

**"Now the People Are Like a Lord"-
Local Effects of Revolutionary Reform in a Tigray Village,
Northern Ethiopia**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.

by

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines aspects of social change in rural Tigray, northern Ethiopia. It is based on fieldwork conducted between February 1993 and February 1995 in two villages located on the south central highland plateau: Enda Mariyam, and Tegula. The majority of fieldwork was conducted in Enda Mariyam - a village of some 228 farming households - and spanned two complete agricultural years.

The thesis considers the local implications of reform measures implemented by nationalist rebels - the Tigray People's Liberation Front - as part of a revolutionary agenda for the transformation of "traditional" Ethiopian peasant society. These measures included, most notably, land tenure reform, as well as changes in customary law and the re-organisation of rural administration. In addition, campaigns were mounted aimed at modifying certain aspects of peasant practice. In the context of a village-based ethnography, the thesis aims to qualify the most significant effects of these measures on social life and livelihoods.

A key concern is how reform measures have affected the relationship between subsistence-oriented production, social organisation, and social stratification. In a setting where agricultural inputs - including land, oxen, and seed - are scarce, differential abilities amongst farming households to access agricultural inputs informs the pattern of social relationships. In this context, land reform is intimately linked to changes in the dynamics of wealth differentiation and social stratification in the village. The implications for the position of "big men" and cultural notions of status-honour are considered.

Together with land reform, reform of customary law in the area of marriage and divorce has wrought subtle but important changes in marriage and divorce practices, and the nature of intra-household relationships. It is argued that public campaigns for the "emancipation" of women have probably had less effect on the ability of women to exert power within marriage, than the economic penalties that men now face upon divorce. Attempts to modify peasant religious practice are also examined, including efforts to minimise the number of holidays in the Ethiopian Orthodox calendar. The outcome of these attempts is explored in terms of notions of disaster and risk, the traditional authority of the Church, and the fragmentation of consensus around religious practice in the village.

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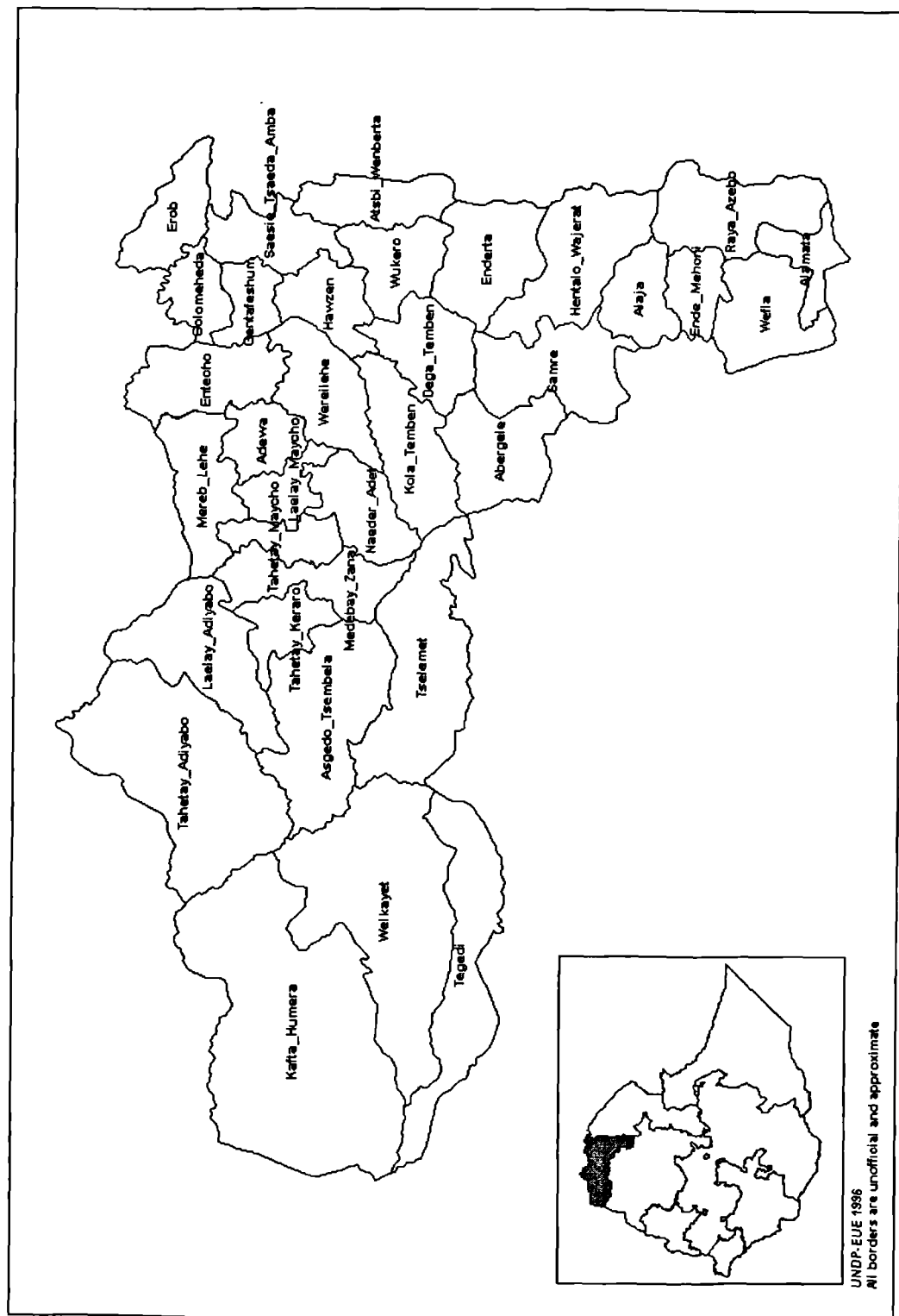
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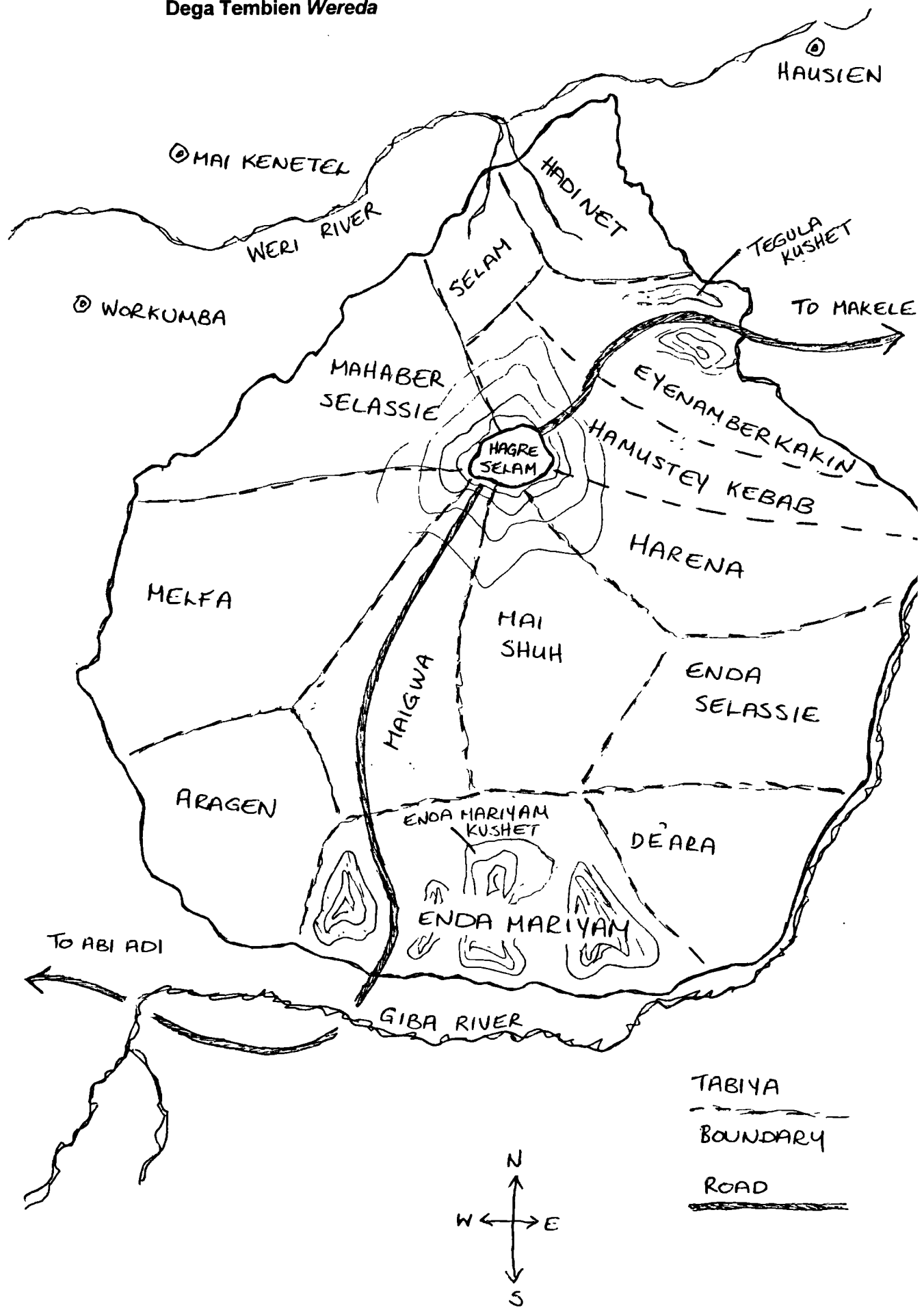
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Wereda Boundaries of Tigray Region



Dega Tembien Wereda

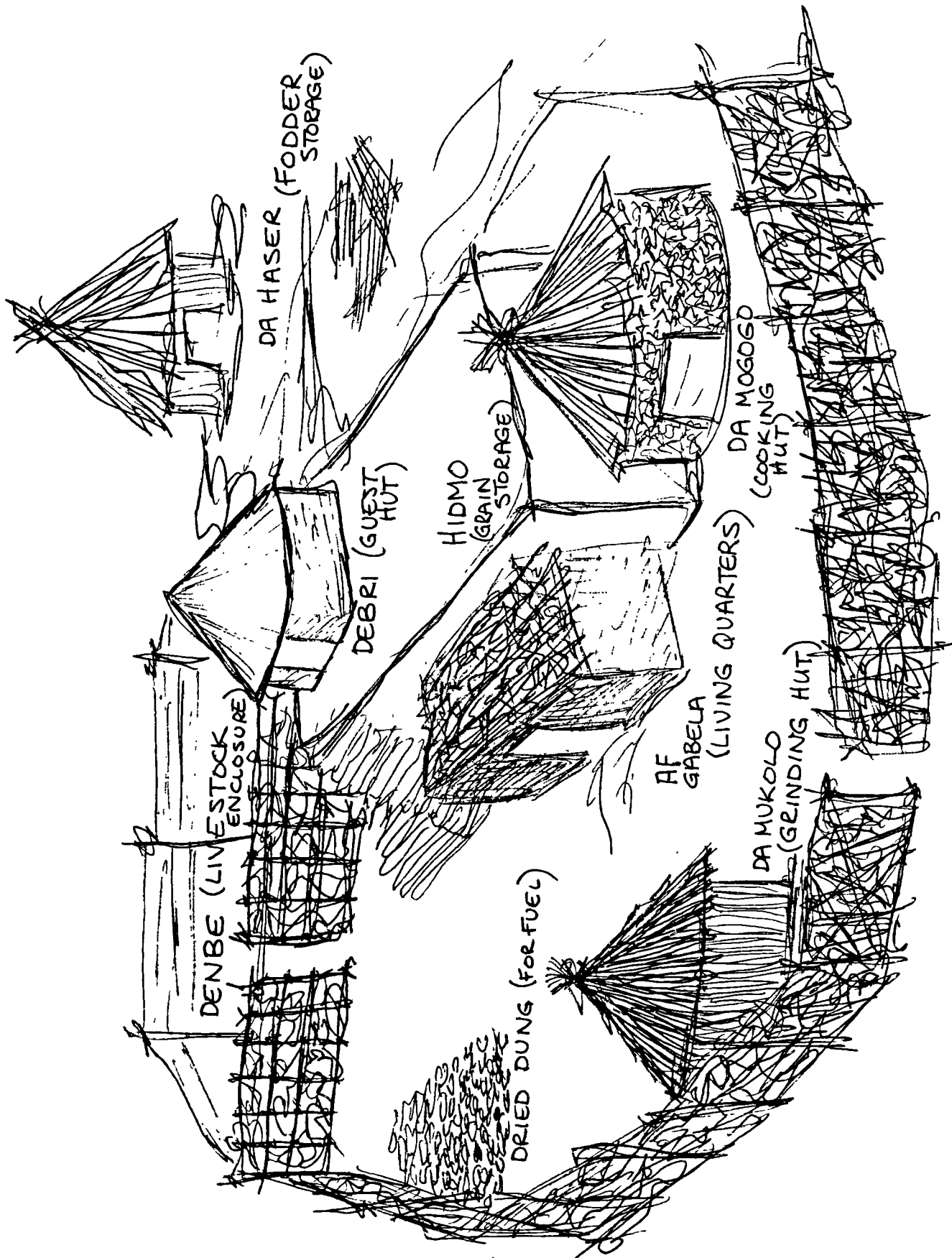


Enda Mariyam Kushet (Village)

10



A Household Compound



CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Before, the land was with us and the people were under our control. People in the past put us as a lord, but now the people are like a lord (Yinota Isra, Enda Mariyam monastery).

1. Background

This thesis examines the local effects of a programme of revolutionary reform among peasants in the northern highlands of Ethiopia. Using material from a particular village, the thesis explores some of the key implications of agrarian reform measures, implemented under the auspices of a rebel movement, for present-day social organisation and practice.

The study is based in Tigray, the northern-most region of the country. Tigray was the epicentre of the widely-publicised Ethiopia famine of 1985. Less visibly for the world at large, it was also the site of protracted military conflict between a nationalist rebel movement and the army of central government, from 1975 to 1991. In 1989, rebel forces of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) "liberated" the whole of Tigray. In May 1991, the TPLF, together with other insurgent groups based in different parts of the country, overthrew the military dictatorship of Menghistu Haile Mariyam, known as the Derg, and formed a transitional government. The transitional period ended in 1995, when the government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was formed. At present, the main political party in the federal government is the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), an alliance of political groups dominated by the TPLF. The TPLF also dominates state government in Tigray.

The study does not concern itself with these wider events, however, except as background. It concentrates instead on the day-to-day workings of agrarian society, and in particular on social life in the village of Enda Mariyam. Enda Mariyam is located on Tigray's densely-populated highland plateau. It comprises approximately 228 peasant households, who earn their living mainly from rainfed agriculture on small plots of land.

Like most other villages throughout Tigray, Enda Mariyam has had a tumultuous recent history. In 1974, with the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie, the imperial world known to villagers for generations collapsed, and new institutional arrangements were introduced under the auspices of the Derg. These were short-lived, however, as the village came under the control of the TPLF in 1980. Some of the young men (and women) of the village were recruited to join rebel combat units; most other youths remained in the village but were nevertheless supporters of the nationalist "armed struggle". From 1980 until the end of the war, village life was overshadowed by the contingencies of warfare, and by episodes of drought-induced famine.

When the people of Enda Mariyam reflect on how their lives have changed in the past two decades, however, it is not the war and famine they mention most frequently, but the reform measures introduced by the TPLF and remaining in place today. These measures were part of the TPLF's agenda for peasant society that aimed to "effect fundamental political, economic and social transformations" (TPLF, 1985: 3). They included, most importantly, the abolition of traditional rights in land and the redistribution of holdings under a new tenure system, as well as a variety of other measures. For a pre-industrial society that, in the late 1970s, still fit Ladurie's (1976: 296) description as "characterized by slow technical change where processes of growth are still dominated by the play between demographic expansion and limited resources", such measures would by definition have profound implications.

The study seeks to understand the implications of these reform measures for the organisation of social relationships in the village. To approach this goal, fieldwork in Enda Mariyam was ambitious in scope and examined many different aspects of social life.¹ It was considered important to maintain a broad approach for a number of reasons.

Most compelling is the almost complete lack of in-depth research on agrarian change in Tigray. Compared to the attention focused on the effects of famine and warfare, the effects of revolutionary reform on rural social life have been woefully neglected. In

¹ See Appendix 1 for details of fieldwork methodology.

part, this is due to the marginalisation for many years of the Tigray revolution itself within the broader Ethiopian context. It is only very recently, for example, that a first attempt at a social history of the revolution has been written (see Young, 1997). With regard to the implementation of reform measures, however, there is only one post-war, independent study of the TPLF land reform programme (see Chiari, 1996).

Further, there is a paucity of ethnographic information about the Tigray themselves. Those few studies that do exist were produced in the 1960s and early 1970s, when there was a relative burst of scholarship on the peoples of northern Ethiopia more generally. Prior to that time, there were few studies of the so-called "peripheral" peoples of Ethiopia, nor were there many ethnographic studies of the social life of the Amhara, the then-dominant nationality. As James (1990: 97-99) observes, Ethiopian scholarship, unlike that in many other African countries, has never had a strong tradition of ethnographic research:

... until very recent times, professional ethnographic writing about Ethiopia was dominated by essentially nineteenth-century styles of civilisation-description and evolutionary explanation, at several removes from people and events 'in the field'. The ethnography of imperial Ethiopia remained enmeshed within a defining framework of ideas, expressed particularly openly in Western fiction, which derived from an old oriental-romantic tradition of African princes far removed from the humdrum world of colonial administration which had become the norm in other parts of Africa... For a brief period during the Italian occupation in the late 1930s a field-ethnographic survey style was introduced... But with the liberation of Ethiopia in 1941... enquiry into local social conditions... languished.

Beginning in the early 1960s, a number of ethnographies were produced that still constitute basic reference texts. These include Levine (1965), Hoben (1963, 1970, 1973, 1975), and Weissleder (1965, 1974), all of whom worked with the Amhara, a people who share many of the basic features of culture and social organisation with the Tigray. Consequently, these works have been of great value to the thesis.

For the Tigray themselves, however, only two detailed studies were produced. The first and most important is Bauer's study (1973, 1975, 1976, 1977) of Hareyna village²

² At the time of Bauer's fieldwork, the village of Hareyna comprised some 253 households, making it roughly equivalent in size to Enda Mariyam, with 228 households.

in eastern Tigray. Bauer's work remains the only existing ethnography of a Tigray village in the pre-revolutionary period. The second is Bruce's (1976) more general legal study of land tenure systems. After the publication of these works, there would be almost a thirty-year gap in ethnographic research on the Tigray.

Beginning in 1974, Ethiopian scholarship experienced a period of politicisation. Under the Derg, nationalist movements operating in the rural "periphery" were either harshly repressed or openly confronted in military campaigns. The state's aggressive efforts to retain power at the centre and maintain control over the elaboration of Ethiopia's political culture were reflected in the boundaries, often self-imposed, of what constituted appropriate areas for scholarly research. It was only in 1991, for example, that social anthropology was taught at Addis Ababa University. In explaining the reasons for the delay, an Ethiopian scholar writes:

Ethiopia was considered as a nation-state. If there were non-integrated groups it was seen as merely a matter of time before they were to be assimilated by a "proper" method of acculturation to the "core culture"... Disciplines such as anthropology were therefore under suspicion since they were seen as bringing to the fore undesirable tendencies and opening new avenues for disintegration (Gedamu, 1991: 22).

While the independent study of the "peripheral" peoples of Ethiopia languished under the Derg, there simultaneously grew up a body of literature from the "liberated" areas of Tigray (see Firebrace and Smith, 1982; Peberdy, 1985; Wright, 1979). Produced mainly by journalists and international aid personnel who travelled with the TPLF, this literature is virtually the only material available on political and social processes in rural areas since the early 1970s. Due to problems of research under war conditions, however, and the desire of many international observers to publicise the Tigray revolution in a positive light, it is somewhat limited in scope.³ Much of the writing focuses on the TPLF and mobilisation for armed struggle, rather than rural social life *per se*. Those few descriptions of village life that do exist tend to be anecdotal and unsystematic.

Moreover, the literature tends to make assumptions about the outcome of the TPLF's reform programme that have not been rigorously tested in the field. Rather,

descriptions of "liberated" areas often reflect an instrumental view of traditional society as susceptible to social programming; consequently the literature often equates the objectives of agrarian reform with actual outcomes.

Since the end of the war, and the proliferation of development initiatives, the Tigray have re-emerged as the subject of scholarly investigation. In the course of this re-emergence, however, much of the ethnographic depth brought to the study of northern Ethiopian peoples in the 1960s and 1970s has been lost. At present, research on rural social life is carried out predominantly in the form of survey questionnaires linked to the implementation of aid projects. Although useful in terms of guiding aid interventions, such research cannot sufficiently qualify or reflect the complex world of the Tigray peasant. Nor can it provide the basis for understanding the implications of agrarian reform in anything more than superficial terms.

In this regard, this thesis aims to help fill a critical gap in understanding of the basic features of Tigray social organisation and practice, as well as to characterise more precisely the nature of changes that have occurred in the aftermath of institutional reform. This is a somewhat different undertaking than charting the history of the Tigray revolution itself. Although more historical analysis is needed on the revolution - especially the dynamics of how and why the peasantry decided to follow a programme of armed resistance - that is not the aim of the present study.

The present study aims rather to identify the social outcomes of institutional reform under the auspices of the revolution, as observed in a specific village setting. In many respects, the thesis is an attempt to "update" the detailed ethnographies of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Throughout, comparisons are made between the pre-revolutionary social world of the northern highlands, described by scholars such as Bauer and Hoben, and the post-revolutionary world of Enda Mariyam.

³ For a description of research in rebel-controlled areas, see Silkin and Hendrie, 1997.

2. A Look at the Literature on Agrarian Reform

Given that this thesis is an ethnographic exploration of the local implications of an agrarian reform programme, it is important to try and situate the material within the literature on agrarian reform more generally. As will be seen, Tigray does not necessarily find a comfortable fit within much of this literature.

In basic terms, agrarian reform can be said to constitute a set of policies and programmes implemented by political rulers that aim to transform, either gradually or rapidly, the total system of agrarian relationships concerned in agricultural production and productivity. In most cases, what is sought is a modernising transition away from a pre-capitalist social order. According to Ghose (1983: 17), agrarian reform is a means of changing pre-capitalist economies into one of three types of agrarian system: capitalist, socialist, or modernised peasant economy.⁴ He goes on to note that:

... on the basis of abstraction from historical experience, the existing agrarian system in developing countries... has to evolve into one of these systems if the problems of agricultural development are to be effectively resolved. Agrarian reform is an instrument available for achieving this transition (Ghose, 1983: 17).

Because agrarian reform aims to transform not only rural economies, but the totality of agrarian relationships involved in production and productivity, it is an inherently political process. Land reform of some variety is almost always implied in the term agrarian reform, and indeed some authors see no value in making a distinction between the two terms (see Abate and Kiros, 1983). Radical land reform, involving a significant re-organisation of pre-existing tenure arrangements, is frequently the centrepiece of attempts to effect rapid political change, often following periods of social upheaval. In Ethiopia, for example, the Derg's Land Reform programme of 1975 represented the first major policy directive of the new government.

⁴ Ghose (1983: 16) defines a modernised peasant economy as one where "ownership and control of means of production are dispersed among basically family-consumption-oriented peasants who employ family labour for production purposes".

The vast majority of literature on agrarian reform - and indeed, much of the literature contained in the category "peasant studies" - concerns the nature of changes precipitated in peasant societies by an increasing articulation with, and integration into, national and international capitalist systems. Before discussing the nature of this articulation, however, it is useful to consider what is meant by the term "peasant".

Most scholars agree on the basic characteristics that distinguish peasants from "capitalist farmers" on the one hand, and "primitive agriculturalists" on the other (see Saul and Woods, 1987). Peasants are producers who produce mainly for their own consumption, using mainly family labour (Harriss, 1982: 24). They rely primarily if not exclusively on agricultural production for their livelihood, in contrast to capitalist farmers who have access to other kinds of livelihood (Hyden, 1980: 11). The family farm or farming household is the basic unit of social organisation (see Shanin, 1987: 3). In contrast to "primitive agriculturalists", the surplus of peasants is extracted and transferred to other, non-agricultural groups (Wolf, 1966a: 4).

While most scholars agree on the basic definition of "peasant", there has been a debate as to whether or not African cultivators can adequately be described as such. Wolf (1966a), in his seminal study of peasant societies, hardly mentions Africa at all.⁵ More specifically, Fallers (1967: 40) suggests that African cultivators should be called "proto-peasants" or "incipient peasants", rather than "full" peasants. Fallers' argument is based on the idea that African cultivators lack sufficient cultural differentiation from the "high" culture of the court or the town to be called "peasant". For Fallers, the word "peasant" implies the existence of a folk culture operating in conscious response to a high culture. Differentiated high cultures have largely been absent in Africa, however, as a consequence of the lack of "literary religious traditions which formed the bases for the European and Asian high cultures" (Fallers, 1967: 40).

Despite the questionable nature of Fallers' argument, other scholars have built on the idea of a "proto" or "incipient" peasantry in Africa. Hyden (1980: 11), for example, suggests that hesitation to use the term "peasant" for traditional African cultivators is justified on the grounds that, from an historical perspective, they have only recently

⁵ In Wolf's (1966a: 91) table of dominant modes of coalition formation, for example, Africa is notably absent from the list of areas where peasant societies may be found.

become incorporated into a wider economic system:

Our conception of the peasantry has been shaped by writings from other parts of the world, in recent years mainly from Asia and Latin America. This image of the peasantry as an overpowered class has in recent analysis of rural Africa been too indiscriminately applied. While it is true that peasant in most parts of the world have been forced to trade their dependence on nature for a dependence on other social classes, and that this process is taking place in Africa today, it is wrong to assume that... it is already complete. In Africa the process is only at its incipient stage.

In his study of *ujamaa* in Tanzania, Hyden (1980) provides a compelling contribution to the debate on the nature of African peasants and agrarian transition more generally. In Kroeber's well-known definition (quoted in Fallers, 1967: 36), peasants are qualified as being "part-societies with part-cultures". This means, in effect, peasants are defined by their links to wider structures over which they have little control; that is, they are only semi-autonomous. As Harriss (1982: 24) suggests:

Peasants may also be described as a 'part society' defined by their subordinate relationships to external markets, the state and the dominant culture.

For Hyden, however, in Africa the opposite is the case. According to Hyden (1980), African peasantries are distinct from Latin American and Asian peasantries by virtue of their relative *autonomy* from larger structures and systems. This is because, in African peasant production, it is labour, not land, that is usually the scarce productive resource. Combined with the fact that African agricultural is mainly rainfed, and uses very basic technologies, this means that, unlike in Asia and Latin America, African peasants are not wholly dependent on other groups or classes for access to the means of production. For Hyden (1980: 9), "Africa is the only continent where the peasants have not yet been captured by other social classes".

Hyden goes on to suggest that, as long as African peasants remain "uncaptured", agrarian reform will be a difficult process. That is because African peasants retain the ability to opt out of any transitional or developmental programme. As Hyden (1980: 213) explains:

The peasant mode of production does not open the door to government intervention very easily. Certainly government and producers are not interdependent parts of the same economic system in such a way that officials operate from a position of strength.

In the case of *ujamaa*, the autonomy of the peasant mode of production enabled Tanzanian cultivators to "hide" from attempts by the state to impose its developmental agenda. Hyden considers the state's ability to operate from a "position of strength" to be a necessary condition for economic development. This can only occur, however, when the state and the peasantry are integrated into a single structural dynamic, where the development initiatives of the state are of *immediate* relevance to the pursuit of individual peasant livelihoods. I will be returning to this aspect of Hyden's argument in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Saul and Woods (1987) agree with Hyden that African peasantries are a relatively recent historical development. They assert (1987: 84) that "a distinctive African peasantry exists".⁶ However, the range of national systems in which African peasantries are enmeshed is quite broad, as a consequence of the "variable combination of international corporations, immigrant settlers and immigrant trading groups, indigenous elites and indigenous national bourgeoisies" that were part of the specific formula of colonialism in each country. In other words, like many other scholars, Saul and Woods (1987: 82) consider the creation of African peasantries to have emerged specifically as a *result* of the encounter between African cultivators and colonialism:

... it is more fruitful to view both the creation of an African peasantry, as well as the creation of the present differentiation among African peasantries, as being primarily the result of the interaction between an international capitalist economic system and traditional socio-economic systems, within the context of territorially defined colonial political systems.

⁶ They would, however, wish to see Chayanov's concept of the peasant household extended to include the African "homestead". Unlike the peasant household, the African homestead is "based on the joint property rights of an extended family, (and) frequently has rights to farm land rather than rights to a particular family farm" (Saul and Woods, 1987: 87).

According to Saul and Woods (1987), traditional African cultivators were transformed into peasants in the context of colonialism through their increasing - often forced - participation in a cash-based economy. In order to meet their needs in the new economies created through colonialism, African cultivators were forced to sell either their labour or their agricultural produce.

While acknowledging the limitations of typologies of transition, Saul and Woods (1987: 83) nevertheless outline some of the ways in which African cultivators "acquired, in effect, their peasant characteristics". These include the development of a cash-crop-based economy in countries such as Ghana, where some cultivators were able to move into the position of capitalist farmers, but where many became tenant farmers. Alternatively, in regions where cash-cropping was less feasible, cultivators combined low-level subsistence production with labour migration to plantation areas. Labour migration was also a feature of countries such as the former Rhodesia, where sectors of high labour demand, such as mining, developed, and where a colonial settler population effectively blocked the participation of African cultivators in cash-crop agriculture.

Unlike many other African peasantries, however, Tigray peasants are "indigenous" Africans. That is - if we accept the argument above - their peasant characteristics did not emerge as a consequence of participation in a wider, capitalist system in the context of colonial rule. Rather, they possessed the key characteristics of "peasants", defined earlier, prior to the advent of 19th century European colonialism. Ethiopia's general uniqueness in sub-Saharan Africa, as a consequence of its never having been colonised,⁷ is sometimes mentioned in passing, but more often than not Ethiopia is simply bracketed out from the framework of analysis of sub-Saharan Africa. Goody (1971: 597) illustrated this tendency when he said that Ethiopia is "African physically, but not socially".

Goody is here referring to a number of features of northern Amhara society that he sees as facilitating a high degree of social differentiation, in contrast to most other

⁷ The exception is the northern territory of Eritrea, colonised by the Italians in the 19th century.

parts of sub-Saharan Africa where there is a relatively low degree of social differentiation. For Goody (1971), social differentiation and an unequal distribution of power and status are characteristics of technologically advanced societies; hence, Ethiopia is the exception rather than the rule in Africa. While his notions about the Amhara were not entirely accurate⁸, Goody does point to characteristics of the northern Ethiopian peasantry that, taken together, render it more or less distinct.

These include, most notably, the use of the ox-drawn plough, which enabled an intensive cultivation on a small land base, and which supported the development of a differentiated church and state elite (see Hoben, 1975). According to Hoben, (1975: 157), this means that control over land, as opposed to control over labour, is the basis for social stratification within the peasant village. In Tigray, the situation is somewhat different; there, oxen constitute the scarce resource, and control over oxen is extremely important in determining household wealth. The particular features of the Tigray production system are discussed later in the thesis. In addition, northern Ethiopian society has traditionally practised dowry rather than brideprice, and there is a tendency to contract marriages between households of roughly commensurate wealth. According to Goody (1971), these features render northern Ethiopian society more like that of traditional Eurasia than Africa, because they encourage the development and maintenance of differentiated social classes.

Notwithstanding some problematic assumptions in Goody's argument, descriptions of peasant social life in Asia and Latin America do sometimes appear to have more in common with Tigray than descriptions of peasant life in other parts of Africa. Shanin's (1987: 21) account of peasant households in 19th century Russia is a case in point:

The peasant household is characterized by the extent of integration of the peasant's family life with its farming enterprise. The family provides the essential work team of the farm, while the farm's activities are geared mainly to production of the basic needs of the family... the basic determinant of household membership was not actual kinship but the total participation in the life of the household or, as the Russian peasants put it, 'eating from the same pot'... The demographic cycles of family history determined to a considerable extent the functioning of the farms, while the needs and seasons of traditional farming prescribed the patterns of everyday life.

⁸ For a critical analysis of Goody's article in relation to the Amhara, See Hoben, 1975.

Another characteristic of northern Ethiopian society that renders it somewhat distinct on the African scene is the fact that capitalism failed to make significant headway in the region. As Markakis and Ayele (1983: 44) note, "Ethiopia's legendary isolation preserved the indigenous feudal social system well into the twentieth century". Indeed, it was not until the mid-20th century that the country established a modern economic sector of any size. In the countryside, large areas of land were alienated from southern peasants for the development of plantation agriculture in the 1950s and 1960s. In the north, however, traditional land tenure arrangements, backed by elites whose positions the tenure system supported, succeeded in blocking the alienation of land for commercial agricultural. As a result:

... the impact of capitalism in this region... was still incipient and less disruptive than it has proved to be in the southern region... Consequently, the northern peasantry retained the traditional perspective largely unmodified until the last days of the old regime (Markakis and Ayele, 1983: 60).

At present, infrastructure remains largely undeveloped in the north, and markets are highly fragmented. The commercialisation of agriculture, begun in the west of Tigray, has yet to make much headway in the rest of the province. Consequently, although there are presently many economic initiatives, including road-building and the development of a nascent industrial sector in the towns, the world of the Tigray peasant remains emphatically rural and local. The "peasant mode of production"⁹ has yet to be significantly affected by the development of commodity-based relations of production. Indeed, it is only since the end of the war, and the growth in international aid programmes, that Tigray peasants have interacted with the global capitalist economy in any significant way.

The majority of agrarian reform programmes in Africa aim to promote growth in the agricultural sector and to "modernise" traditional rural economies. In so doing, one of

⁹ Hyden (1980: 12) defines the mode of production as "the economic organisation of a society in its widest sense... a way of organising reproduction of both material and social conditions". I have chosen not to delve into the intricacies of the "mode of production" debate, although it occupied scholars in the field of peasant studies for some time. In simplest form, this debate contrasts what Harriss (1982: 24) calls the "peasant differentiation" perspective with the notion of a "specific peasant economy". The former assumes that peasants will disappear and become either capitalist farmers or agricultural proletariats, while the latter attempts to account for the persistence within modern economies of a distinct peasant mode of production.

the key components of agrarian reform measures has been land reform. According to Bassett (1993: 11), the 1960s and 1970s were "the land reform decades" in Africa. During this period, many newly-independent governments enacted new land legislation. Broadly-speaking, these initiatives were aimed at modernising agricultural production through the transformation of productive relationships along either capitalist or socialist paths. In the former, land reform involved the individualisation of land rights; in the latter, it involved the collectivisation of agriculture through the development of state farms and producers co-operatives.

A common objective in both cases, however, was the eventual elimination of indigenous tenure systems. As Okoth-Ogendo (1993: 255) notes, indigenous tenure systems were seen as a major drawback to agricultural growth, because their "communal" nature retarded individual initiative and encouraged inflexibility.

Because indigenous tenure systems blocked individual ownership of land, they were seen by capitalist-oriented governments as incapable of providing the tenure security necessary for investment, which in turn would promote increased efficiency and productivity. Consequently, in countries such as Kenya, laws were enacted that aimed at transforming complex sets of indigenous land rights into European-style private property rights, through registration of individual titles (see Shipton, 1988). According to Bassett (1993: 8), such land reform policies represented a continuation of colonial policies, implemented in the decades after World War II, in which progress in the agricultural sector would be measured by the "gradual dissolution of 'communal tenure' into individual rights in land". As Bassett (1993) illustrates, this view retains significant currency in present-day debates over Africa's agricultural development.

While governments interested in promoting commercial agriculture saw indigenous tenure systems as blockages to economic growth, governments interested in promoting socialism also saw indigenous tenure systems as problematic, because they left open a pathway for capitalism to penetrate rural social relations and promote inequality. However, few examples of radical land reform have resulted in either an increase in agricultural productivity or an enduring equality. In the case of Ethiopia under the Derg, while radical land reform was initially welcomed, especially in the south, the modalities for collectivisation of agriculture became increasingly harsh,

culminating in forced villagisation in many regions. In Somalia, Hoben (1988) details how, after the enactment of land laws in 1975, all land officially belonged to the state and land sale and tenancy were outlawed. Despite this, however, land was bought, sold, and rented in the context of long-term leases. As Hoben (1988: 215) observes, because different types of rights existed over the same land, land could still be concentrated among those groups that were able to mobilise significant political and economic resources.

In Tigray, as in other parts of Africa where dedicated land reform policies were implemented, the indigenous tenure system was considered to be a blockage to economic growth and social development of the peasantry. In this case, however, it was not the "communal" nature of the traditional tenure system as such that was seen as an impediment, but the way it supported the "feudal" world of the *ancien regime*. One of the TPLF's key objectives in implementing agrarian reform was to radically alter this world. With "feudal" lords undermined by the abolition of rights of benefice, and with an egalitarian redistribution of plots, peasants would be able to "increase production and improve their livelihoods" (TPLFa, 1988: 5).

However, the envisaged increase in production would not be brought about through the promotion of commodity-based agriculture or socialist agriculture. In this regard, the TPLF land reform is distinct in the African context. Land reform was an instrument for agrarian transition away from "feudalism", but toward a less well-defined notion of, essentially, a modernised peasantry. Although it is likely that many of its leadership expected peasants would eventually make the transition to capitalist farming, the TPLF's land reform was not specifically designed to establish commodity-based relations in the countryside. Rather, peasant smallholder production, based on the use of household and hired labour, was explicitly protected.

Nor did the TPLF land reform aim to modernise peasant production through collectivisation. Despite the TPLF leadership's origins in the Marxist student movement in Addis Ababa, the example of the Derg's land reform and forced collectivisation of peasant farms provided an object lesson in what not to do. Rather, the TPLF adopted a pragmatic approach to sharecropping and wage-labour that contrasted sharply with land reform in the rest of the country.

Since the passing of the land reform decades, it has become clear that many of the ideas upon which African reform programmes were based are too simplistic. Assumptions about indigenous tenure systems have been challenged by new studies that show the complexity of the relationship between rights in land, agricultural practices, investment in land, power, gender, and social status. Bassett (1993) calls particular attention to village-based studies (for example, Berry, 1988; Davison, 1988) that contradict the notion of indigenous tenure as retarding the agricultural sector, by showing how the flexibility of land rights in many indigenous systems allows for the dynamic circulation and transfer of land resources. As Bassett (1993: 20) observes:

...the circulation of land via borrowing, inheritance, leasing, and pledging is a key characteristic of flexible indigenous tenure systems. Land was even alienable during the precolonial period, a type of transfer that should not be seen exclusively as an outgrowth of capitalist land markets. The issue of secure rights in land under indigenous control cannot be answered outside of those social systems in which rights are assumed, negotiated, lost.

Bassett (1993: 23) goes on to contrast the flexibility of many indigenous tenure systems with the "the *etatist* nature" of some agrarian reform programmes, including those in Somalia and Ethiopia, which "fostered increasingly rigid land allocation and management practices". That egalitarian land reform may limit the flexibility of pre-existing tenure systems is an issue that will be revisited later in the thesis.

This section has sought to highlight, in the context of a brief and highly selective review of some of the literature on agrarian reform, some specific ways in which the experience of Tigray is distinct in the African context. However, there is a danger in claiming too much uniqueness for a particular case. Every case of agrarian transition is by definition unique, and will involve different combinations of environmental, ecological, political, economic and social factors, situated in an historically-specific context. For this reason, many of the day-to-day social implications of agrarian reform can only be fully understood in the course of detailed empirical studies. As Gledhill (1991: 3) observes with reference to his own study of agrarian reform in the village of Guaracha, Mexico:

We can make one... straightforward claim for anthropological research at the micro-level. (We) might tell... about the more mundane advantages of living in a place and gaining the confidence of those we study. The data on such matters as *ejidal* land tenure or international migration provided in this book could not have been obtained in any other way... (If one wishes to provide an accurate picture of the mundane realities of the social reproduction of a *campesino* community, it is hard to see how such a picture could be obtained without doing anthropological fieldwork.

It is the "mundane realities" of social life in Enda Mariyam village that this thesis hopes to uncover. In the section below, the more specific issues explored in each chapter of the thesis are outlined.

Before leaving this section, however, it is worth making some brief comments on the literature on agrarian reform in Ethiopia after the fall of the imperial regime. Despite a plethora of studies on the agrarian reform programme of the Derg (see Halliday and Molyneux 1981; Pausewang, 1983; Rahmato, 1984), there is little empirical information in these studies on the specific implications of reform for rural social life and social organisation. Rather, many studies of Ethiopia's agrarian transition under the Derg use a political economy approach that analyses agrarian transition in terms of changing relationships of production, class, rural strata, or other kinds of abstract social categories.

In some cases, this is reflected in a tendency toward superficial analysis of pre-existing social organisation. The dynamics of traditional land tenure arrangements in northern Ethiopia, for example, are often casually glossed as "feudal" without discussion of key ways in which these arrangements differed from, for example, the feudalism of medieval Europe (see Hoben, 1975). Since any reform measures will interact dynamically with existing structures and practices, detailed understanding of the social context in which reform is mounted is critical to assessing its effects.

Another tendency in this literature is to consider whether agrarian reform "succeeded" or "failed". Abate and Kiros (1983), for example, assess the land reform programme of the Derg primarily in terms of whether greater equity in size of peasant landholding was achieved - an explicit aim of the government. In so doing, land size is used as a proxy indicator of the impact of land reform on peasant social organisation, and the relationship between different rural strata.

Such an approach fails, however, to provide a sufficient basis for understanding the *processes* that affect household status, including how land, oxen, labour and gender interrelate to determine household wealth. Nor does it provide a basis for understanding why agrarian reform measures were experienced in a particular way, and were productive of particular outcomes, in a given social and historical context. Unfortunately, many analyses of the Ethiopian land reform follow a similar analytical pathway.

This is not to say, however, that it is not important to understand why and with what purpose agrarian reform is mounted. On the contrary, the objectives and modalities of agrarian reform, and the ideological and institutional framework in which it is implemented, are critical elements that influence the local experience of reform measures. For this reason, the aims of the TPLF's revolutionary reform agenda are outlined in the next chapter.

At the same time, to paraphrase Foucault (Smart, 1983: 116), social outcomes are always infinitely more complex than any programmatic formula. Hence, an analysis of agrarian reform solely in terms of stated goals versus achievements is insufficient to understand what has actually happened. We must broaden the field of understanding beyond a pre-formulation of what category of changes have or have not occurred.

3. Overview of Chapter Contents

This thesis comprises an ethnographic approach to the question of agrarian reform in Tigray. It aims to understand the implications of agrarian reform not in terms of "success" or "failure", nor in terms of abstract categories of strata or class, but in terms of the day-to-day processes that shape social organisation and social relationships in a specific village context. While land reform remains in the viewfinder throughout, other aspects of the TPLF's revolutionary reform programme are also considered.

Although events in Tigray's recent history are not the specific concern of this thesis, a contextualising overview is necessary. Chapter 2 provides a brief outline of recent history in the region, with particular focus on two areas: rural social life prior to the end of imperial rule in 1974, and the nature of institutional reform in "liberated areas" under the TPLF after 1975.

Although part of this history, the effects of war and the collapse of the rural economy into famine do not figure prominently in Chapter 2. One reason for this is that these are topics covered in some detail elsewhere in the literature on northern Ethiopia (see for example Africa Watch, 1991). More importantly, while warfare and famine led to widespread impoverishment, they were contingent rather than systemic phenomena, in that they did not alter the basic premises of rural social life. It was institutional reform under rebel administration that was to have the most significant effect in this regard.

Chapter 2 devotes considerable attention to reform measures, with particular focus on land reform. Given that land constitutes the basis for rural livelihoods, no other single reform implemented by the TPLF would have as profound an effect on day-to-day social life. Also, no other aspect of the TPLF's revolutionary agenda would intervene as directly in the organisation of peasant production. In the course of implementing land reform, local committees were established that formed the basis for a new system of rural administration, centred on locally-elected people's councils, or *baytos*.¹⁰ After a discussion of land reform, the chapter provides a brief overview of the *bayto* system and changes in administrative and judicial arrangements.

The local experience of revolutionary reform cannot be considered in isolation from the subsistence world in which peasants reside. The dictates of ensuring a livelihood in the particular setting of Tigray agriculture are harsh. They constitute the reality of day-to-day life, as well as the template through which wider historical events are interpreted. In a context where most households are chronically food insecure, the constraints of subsistence need to remain in the foreground of analysis.

¹⁰ For clarity, Tigrinya words are pluralised throughout the thesis by adding a non-italicised "s".

This requires, however, a basic understanding of how the local farm economy operates. To this end, Chapter 3 provides an overview of the farm economy of Enda Mariyam, with particular focus on how farm households gain access to agricultural inputs. In a setting where rainfed cereal cropping is the most important source of income, but where only a minority of households own the necessary farm inputs, gaining access to farm inputs constitutes a central feature of the subsistence landscape. In particular, the chapter considers the relationship between oxen ownership, access to land for cultivation, and household wealth, and the implications of this for the structure of economic relationships in the present day.

Institutions surrounding agricultural inputs have historically served to both pattern and stratify local-level social relationships. During the *ancien regime*, peasant land tenure was based on a complex system of usufruct rights known as *risti*. Although it guaranteed rights in land for all members of a descent group, by the mid-1970s the local operation of *risti* had become highly inegalitarian. Landholdings were concentrated in the hands of a minority of households, who were also able to accumulate a majority of oxen resources. The concentration of land and oxen in the hands of a small number of "big men" constituted the practical dimension of a social order characterised by networks of vertically-oriented relationships of dependence. These relationships provided the framework within which productive inputs circulated. At the same time, to be a "big man" required that one possess moral as well as agricultural capital, in the form of *kibri*, or status-honour.

The implementation of land reform beginning in the late 1970s, which abolished all pre-existing rights in land, thus set in motion a number of far-reaching and multi-dimensional changes in peasant society. Chapter 4 considers these changes, with particular focus on the relationship between the redistribution of landholdings, social stratification, and notions of status-honour.

The land reform programme of the TPLF differed in several crucial respects from that of the Derg. One of these was the fact that rights in land were granted to individual adults rather than to households. Adult men and women thus obtained rights in land regardless of their marital status. Chapter 5 examines the implications of this aspect

of land reform for marriage and divorce practices, and for the process of separation to establish a newly-independent household after marriage. Marriage and divorce arrangements involve the transfer of rights in property from one household unit to another; crucially, these transfers are gendered. One of the explicit objectives of revolutionary reform was to promote the equality of women by modifying the transfer of property rights upon marriage and divorce. Chapter 5 also explores how the reform of customary law, combined with land reform, has affected the autonomy and status of women.

Chapter 6 examines the implications of reform measures for local religious practice. In the ox-plough regions of the northern highlands, the local practice of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity has an important bearing on agricultural production and land use because, amongst other things, it serves to regulate agricultural labour. Chapter 6 considers how changes in the local economy precipitated by land reform have affected the capacity of villagers to follow "traditional" religious practice. The chapter also explores the implications of attempts to directly modify local religious practice - especially to reduce the number of annual saints' days and other holy days, when no work may be done on the land. With these attempts, TPLF hoped to free peasant labour to pursue more agriculturally productive activities, and thereby reduce food insecurity. They have had complex implications. Chapter 6 describes debates in Enda Mariyam over the question of work on holy days and considers how religious practice has, in many respects, become a contested area of social life.

Chapter 7 then concludes the thesis by summarising the implications of the ethnographic material presented in previous chapters, in terms of both change and continuity in Tigray village life. The chapter also considers broader issues in the changing relationship between the village and the state.

4. The Setting and the Society

The remainder of this chapter provides an overview of the region and village(s) where fieldwork took place, and considers some of the main aspects of Tigray social life.

4.1 Tigray Region and People

The Tigray¹¹ inhabit a region that coincides roughly with the location of the ancient Axumite Empire, which existed from the first to the seventh century AD. Sometime in AD 330, the Axumite king converted to Christianity in its Orthodox form (Zewde, 1991). Subsequently, Orthodox Christianity became closely linked to the cultural identity of the northern peoples, the Tigray and the Amhara.

The Tigray comprise 94.8% of the population of Tigray Region¹² and number some 3 million people (Central Statistical Authority, 1995). They speak Tigrinya, a language derived from ancient Gi-iz, now only used in the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Bruce (1976) has observed that the Tigray have an historical importance in Ethiopia out of proportion to their numbers. This is due to their identity, together with the Amhara, as the cultural heirs of ancient Axum, and to their historical position as co-claimants to the Imperial Throne of the Abyssinian Empire. From the 13th century forward, however, the political centre of this empire gradually shifted southward from Axum to the Amhara provinces of Gondar and Shoa. With the single exception of Emperor Yohannes (1872-1889), it was the Amhara rather than Tigray who controlled the Imperial Throne. According to Bruce (1976: 17), after nearly a millennium the Tigray still consider the Amhara to be political upstarts. Resentment among the Tigray at their marginalisation from the political centre of Ethiopia was greatly exacerbated in the 20th century by a process of "Amharisation", wherein Tigrinya was replaced by Amharic as the official language of education and administration.

¹¹ The 1994 government census report refers to the "Tigraway" (Central Statistical Office, 1995). I prefer the word "Tigray", after Bauer (1973) and Bruce (1976).

¹² The Federal Constitution of 1994 constituted Ethiopia as a republic with nine states, including Tigray. More commonly, the term "Tigray Region" is used. Prior to 1991, Tigray was a province of Ethiopia.

Geographically, Tigray Region is vertically bisected by a highland plateau, including mountains rising to over 4,000 metres, which continues southward gradually dropping in altitude. On the eastern side of the region, the plateau drops off into an extension of the Rift valley, which quickly becomes a semi-arid coastal plain. This plain is inhabited by the pastoral Afar people. In 1994, the Afar Region was constituted, comprising the coastal plain plus parts of Enderta and Raya Kobo in Tigray. To the west, there are the sparsely populated lowlands of Wolkeit and Shire, which traditionally produce surpluses of grain, sesame and incense. Tigray's single river is the Tekeze, which changes from slow-moving stream to torrential flood during the rainy season.

Typically, highland areas of Tigray above 2,000 meters receive better rainfall, while lowland areas (below 1,600 meters) are more arid. The highland plateau is the most densely populated and suffers from the most severe environmental degradation. Smallholders farm both on flat-topped parts of the plateau, and on steep slopes.

Settlement patterns differ from district to district. In some places there are nucleated villages separated from each other by substantial geographic features, such as steep hills and mountains. In other areas, settlement is widely scattered throughout the landscape. There are also both regional and local variations in rainfall patterns. As Bauer (1973: 131) notes, "I have been soaked on one side of the village while the other side remained perfectly dry."

The majority of Tigray are sedentary agriculturalists. Economic life revolves around ox-plough cropping and animal husbandry. The agricultural system can be described as a "dry grain agrarian mode" (Hill, 1982: 50). That is, nearly all available farm land is cultivated each season, cultivation is undertaken mainly by household members, farm tools and equipment are of "traditional" design and locally produced, and crop yields are low due to reliance on rainfall (see Hill, 1982).

With little industrial development and a history of low levels of investment in regional infrastructure, commerce and trade are the most important economic activities for urban Tigray, comprising some 15% of the population. Main towns, including the

regional capital Makele, are situated along the single paved road system, built during the brief period of Italian occupation from 1936 to 1941. Off the main road there are dirt and stone tracks, but these are of poor quality. Wheeled transport is rare; most movement of goods occurs by pack animals or by foot. In the countryside, education and health care are poorly developed, and adult and infant mortality rates are high.

In administrative terms, Tigray Region is comprised of *weredas*, which can be loosely glossed as "districts". Each *wereda* has a population of around 40,000 people, and is administered by a locally-elected council known as a *mikre bet* (Barnabas and Zwi, 1997). Every *wereda*, in turn, is divided into smaller units of administration, known as *tabiyas*.

A *tabiya* is equivalent to the administrative unit that, in other parts of Ethiopia, is delimited by a single Peasant Association. *Tabiyas* are made up of a cluster of villages, usually three to five. They constitute the smallest unit of formal governance in Tigray and are also administered by *mikre bets*. Villages - or *kushets*¹³ - do not have formal administrations. Typically those persons elected to the *mikre bet* from each *kushet* act as informal leaders, but all important decisions are taken at *tabiya* level.

Tabiya and *kushet* are sometimes conflated in the literature under the single word "village". However, they are distinct units. Indeed, there may be tension between the various *kushets* that comprise a *tabiya*, usually over common resources such as pastureland. *Kushets* can be further broken down into distinct residential clusters or neighbourhoods, known as *got*.¹⁴

4.2 The Village Setting: Enda Mariyam (and Tegula)

The village of Enda Mariyam, where the bulk of fieldwork was conducted, is located in Dega Tembien *wereda* on the south-central highland plateau. Dega Tembien has a

¹³ For ease of reading, the English word "village" is used throughout the text as a synonym for *kushet* (see Tuquabo Aressi, 1987).

¹⁴ See Appendix 3 for a glossary of Tigrinya words.

population of approximately 50,000 people, living in 14 *tabiyas*. Of these, nine are categorized as highland (*dega*) and five as midland (*woyna dega*). In total, there are 57 *kushets* (villages) in the *wereda*.

The *wereda* capital is Hagre Selam, a small but bustling town linked to Makele by an all-weather road that was nearing completion during the period of fieldwork. Hagre Selam hosts the district market every Saturday, which offers crops, livestock and a small array of manufactured consumer goods. To the south of Hagre Selam, the terrain changes from highland and midland to the lowland plain of Tembien, where the much larger town of Abi Adi is located. Although Hagre Selam is the main marketplace for residents of Enda Mariyam, the new road has made it easier to access the markets in Abi Adi and Makele.

Enda Mariyam is one of three villages in the *tabiya*, also called Enda Mariyam, located approximately 13 kilometres south of Hagre Selam. Due to its location in the south of the *wereda*, the *tabiya* was one of the first to fall under the control of the TPLF during the war, while the rest of the district remained under government control.

The three villages that make up Enda Mariyam *tabiya* are densely populated. Enda Mariyam village is the most populous, with some 228 households. The *tabiya* as a whole has a population of approximately 3,500 people. Enda Mariyam is the highest village in the *tabiya*, with an altitude of approximately 2,700 metres. The other two villages, Enda Michael and Mai Woini, are several hundred metres lower in valleys formed on either side of a mountain plateau where Enda Mariyam is situated.

The village is generally considered to be a good place to live, in large part due to the fertility of its soil. The village also has a good water source, consisting of a deep well with rock siding only 20 minutes' walk from the centre of the village. This well was constructed several generations ago; informants tell me that it has never run dry, even during the worst drought years.

Within Enda Mariyam, people reside in one of six different *gots*. Each *got* comprises a nucleated settlement of compounds, with agricultural land extending from just outside each settlement to the edge of the *tabiya*. Each *got* has its own settlement history. Adi

Lem Lem, for example, is the newest *got* in the village and was settled not more than 30 years ago to accommodate a growing village population. In the oldest *got* of the village, Mahel Geza, there are the two churches of Mariyam and Tekle Himinut, as well as a monastery housing approximately 20 monks. Mahel Geza is the focal point of religious and political life in the *tabiya*. All *tabiya* meetings are held in a clearing in front of the Mariyam church. After Mahel Geza, the next oldest *got* is Endabazbanom, where I took up residence for the period of fieldwork.

The typical Enda Mariyam compound comprises two or three dwellings made of stone, timber, and mud surrounded by a stone or wooden fence. Compounds are usually occupied by a single household, typically comprising a husband and wife and their children. Extended families in the same household are rare. As will be seen, it is the goal of every young adult to establish their own, independent household.

According to local history, Enda Mariyam was originally settled by a man named Negede, who traveled to Axum from Egypt in the first century A.D. From Axum, Negede looked southwards and saw the mountain Tsetsan, which borders the village to the north. Bringing with him a *tabot*¹⁵ from Axum, he founded the church of Mariyam and claimed all the lands surrounding the church. Shortly after Negede, three other men arrived - Sersu, Malaka, and Ahuba - and Negede granted each of them land in turn. According to informants, the majority of village residents can trace their descent through either male or female lines from one of these four original settlers, known as *balabat*, and often to more than one. Prior to land reform, land rights in the village were contingent upon the ability to establish such descent.

Older informants report that during the period of Emperor Haile Selassie, there was a steady flow of migrants from neighbouring *tabiyas* who settled in Enda Mariyam, having been attracted by the village's fertile soils and its reputation as a pious community due to the presence of the monastery. These in-migrants married village residents and, through their children, established land rights through descent claims. After the arrival of the Derg in the mid-1970s, however, villagers say in-migration

¹⁵ A wooden board symbolising the Ark of the Covenant. Every Ethiopian Orthodox church has a *tabot*, which is the most sacred object in the church. Indeed, it is the *tabot*, rather than church, that is consecrated.

dwindled dramatically. At present, due to population growth among existing residents, *tabiya mikre bet* members say they would resist any newcomers who wanted to settle, although there does not appear to be any in-migration at present. Indeed, such movement as was possible to detect appears to be in the opposite direction, comprising mainly young men leaving the village to seek employment in the towns.

In addition to those who can trace their ancestry to a founding settler, there is also resident in the village a blacksmith and his kin who cannot. Blacksmiths, like other artisan groups in the northern highlands, are normatively endogamous. During the imperial period they were prevented from holding rights in land.

Blacksmiths are considered to be *tebib*, meaning people in possession of the evil eye, which causes humans and oxen to sicken and die. Informants say blacksmiths cannot help using the evil eye but are overcome by the force of their own power. Reminick (1975: 32) reports the same lack of intentionality of blacksmiths (*tayb* in Amharic) among the Amhara, adding that attacks of the evil eye are thought to be provoked by fear; hence, one must pretend to be carefree and unafraid in the presence of a *tayb*. This tallies with what I observed during fieldwork, when the arrival of the blacksmith at a public gathering appeared to be deliberately ignored by all present.

Those people whose ancestry has been mixed with blacksmiths through intermarriage in previous generations are called *gebechere*, meaning of mixed or impure ancestry. Since those with even a distant blacksmith ancestor may inherit the power of the evil eye, residents of Enda Mariyam are keen to represent themselves as being *chuwa*, or of pure ancestry, even when they are not. Indeed, following the abolition of the traditional land tenure system, one of the main reasons to remember one's descent chain (*ahlet*) is to prove that one is *chuwa*. This is important primarily in the context of marriage contracts, where parents will try to ascertain the exact *ahlet* of a prospective bride or groom for their children. Nevertheless, people say that, after the abolition of *risti* land tenure, they have begun to forget their *ahlet*, as it is no longer necessary to establish rights in land. At the same time, if one is *gebechere*, it is more convenient to forget; otherwise, it may be difficult to find a marriage partner.

In addition to Enda Mariyam village, some limited fieldwork was also conducted in Tegula, in the eastern part of the *wereda*. Tegula is a very different village from Enda Mariyam. It is geographically larger, with homesteads scattered widely across a hilly plain. It is also more drought-prone. Walking through Tegula, one is struck by the arid quality of the landscape, as opposed to the relatively green vistas of Enda Mariyam. According to farmers in Tegula, their soil is of a much poorer quality than the soil in Enda Mariyam. This, combined with poor rainfall,¹⁶ means the village typically produces a much poorer harvest than does Enda Mariyam.

The difference in agricultural productivity of the two villages is reflected in the fact that Tegula residents typically rely on migration for wage-labour in addition to crop production. This is in contrast to Enda Mariyam, where the majority of households typically rely primarily on crop production, and there is little seasonal out-migration from the village. During the 1984/85 famine, the people of Tegula were forced to leave their homes, and the entire village migrated either to the regional capital, Makele, or to eastern Sudan. Since that time, Tegula residents say they have not had what could be called an "adequate" harvest, mainly due to poor rainfall. On the other hand, Tegula has a much larger grazing area than Enda Mariyam. Indeed, the *tabiya* where Tegula is located has the largest livestock population in the *wereda*.

Tegula also has the reputation among *wereda* administrators of being a "good" village, insofar as a majority of its residents are enthusiastic about participation in local projects such as soil and water conservation. *Wereda* administrators explain this enthusiasm with reference to Tegula's greater poverty as compared to villages in the southern part of the district, and hence the greater willingness of Tegula people to take an active part in development initiatives. Enda Mariyam, on the other hand, is known to *wereda* administrators as a "difficult" village, meaning development projects are not always enthusiastically embraced. As one *wereda* administrator noted, "Enda Mariyam people have to argue about everything."

¹⁶ Tegula abuts onto the edge of Enderta, one of the worst-affected parts of the region during the 1984/85 famine. Generally, as one moves eastward, vulnerability to drought increases.

4.3 Aspects of Social Life

4.3.1 The Tigray Household

An introduction to Tigray ethnography can profitably begin with a consideration of normative aspects of the household. The household constitutes the most important unit of social reproduction (see Bauer, 1973; Poluha, 1989). As in other peasant societies, Tigray households are the main units of both production and consumption. There is not much hiring of labour, especially agricultural labour, in Enda Mariyam. Most households manage crop and livestock production tasks on their own.

As well as its economic importance, the household is also the most significant unit for defining an individual's status in the village. Every young person in Enda Mariyam looks forward to the time when he or she will separate from their natal household and establish their own, independent household. For young men, heading one's own household is a pre-requisite to recognition as a fully adult member of the village, and to participation in the host of social activities and responsibilities this entails. For men, the failure to establish an independent household, and especially to remain dependent on one's natal household, is to be brought "low". There is, however, no distinction made, in terms of the socially-defined position of household head, between men and women, so that women may also be household heads in their own right. In Enda Mariyam, around one-quarter of households were headed by women, typically older women who had been divorced or widowed.

Tigray households are small in size and frequently comprise a nuclear family.¹⁷ However, there is no word in Tigrinya that can be accurately glossed as "family". Kin are called, alternatively, *haw* or *zemed*, but these terms do not convey the notion of co-residential family as would be commonly understood in English. The closest equivalent in Tigrinya is the word *bete seb*, meaning literally "house people" or

¹⁷ According to a household survey, the average is 4.3 persons. Two-thirds of surveyed households comprise a household head, spouse, and children. See Appendix 1 (Section 4.4) for details of survey methodology, and Appendix 8 for a simple frequency analysis of findings.

"people of the house". Individuals commonly use the term *bete seb* to refer to those with whom they reside and share common resources, notably grain.

The phrase "people of the house" provides an important clue to the character of the Tigray household. Holy (1996) notes that a basic analytical distinction should be drawn between "family" as a unit of kinship, and "household" as a unit of residence, although the two may, in fact, overlap. In Tigray, while many households are comprised of nuclear families, household membership is not automatically restricted to close kin or affines. Rather, it is possible, and in the past not uncommon, for distant kin and non-kin to be incorporated.¹⁸ This may occur, for example, when the head of a household requiring additional labour takes in a member of another household to fulfil a specific task position. Such new members may remain within the household, sharing the same rights and obligations as other members. As Hoben (1970: 199) notes, "It is difficult for a casual visitor to distinguish the head's children from his young dependent relatives or servants."

In fact, the notion of "family" is misleading. Instead of a family, the Tigray household is more accurately conceptualised as a co-resident enterprise, deploying its resources under the direction of a household head toward ensuring a livelihood:

The household does not correspond to our common-sense conception of family. It is not a "natural" familial unit whose size and fortunes are determined primarily by facts of marriage, birth, death, and inheritance... Rather, it must be regarded as an enterprise based in a group of people predominantly linked by ties and sentiments of kinship who live together in a single homestead under the authority of a head, and work together under his and his wife's direction to exploit the land and livestock under his control (Hoben, 1973: 164).

Although the household comprises people linked by ties of kinship, household membership at any given time is determined less by such ties than by economic considerations. Turning again to Hoben (1973: 165), he notes that:

¹⁸ Informants say this is less common today, as fewer households can afford to incorporate new members.

The composition, size and social status of a household are dependent not so much on chance of birth as on the managerial talents of its head, on his ability to maintain orderly relations among its working members, to organize its agricultural activities, and to gain and retain control over scattered fields of arable land.

Within the household, the head customarily has unquestioned authority to direct the activities of household members. This is expressed in terms of the head's status as *azazi*, or one who gives orders, and the status of all other household members - especially dependent children - as *tazazi*, or one who receives orders. In general, junior male members of a household follow the orders of more senior males, as do junior females. Since household tasks are strongly gender-defined, with women and men responsible for the domestic field and the production field, respectively, this chain of command makes sense. At the same time, age is also a factor in the extent to which orders are obeyed. An older female can usually ignore the orders of a younger male. Everyone, however, is obliged to obey the orders of the household head.

Despite being *azazi*, the Tigray household head does not have unlimited authority nor exclusive rights to household resources. Although the resources of the household are under his or her management, resources belonging to individual members cannot be disposed of without their consent. This is true, for example, in cases where a woman has brought an ox or a cow to the household through marriage. The animal will be used for the household's common livelihood pursuits, but in case of divorce it will remain with the woman. Indeed, the sale of an animal belonging to a spouse by the household head, without consultation, is grounds for divorce. In addition, if members are dissatisfied with the way the household head is directing the household's fortunes, they can simply leave, taking with them any of the resources in which they have rights. In this respect, a successful household head is a successful manager of people as well as resources.

In general, the size of the household increases as the household's wealth increases, and its labour requirements rise. In Enda Mariyam, for example, households with no

oxen averaged 3.5 persons, while households with 2 oxen averaged 5 persons.¹⁹ This points to another feature of the Tigray household: namely, that its composition is liable to change over time, largely in coincidence with the changing portfolio of household resources. Importantly, however, the portfolio of resources at a household's disposal is itself subject to change in Tigray's risk-prone farming economy. A household that has produced a bumper harvest one year, for example, may experience near total crop failure in the following year, due to pest infestation, drought, a localised hailstorm or other event. Crop failure is usually followed by the sale of assets - notably oxen.

Aside from death, households are created and dissolved through the institutions of marriage and divorce. Marriage is normally virilocal, although there are exceptions. Some men who contract marriages with women from Enda Mariyam, for example, choose to settle in Enda Mariyam due to its fertile soils. In contrast, men from Tegula say they have difficulty attracting women to the village to marry.

Marriage is best described, following Bauer (1975: 236), as a contractual agreement involving little ceremony and requiring no religious sanctification. Ideally, a marriage contract brings together the minimum amount of resources necessary for a new couple to manage as an independent household. Junior members, including distant or non-kin who have been "incorporated" into the household, have the right to expect their first marriage to be sponsored by the head of their household, including the provision of resources. In Enda Mariyam, the bride's sponsoring household typically provides cattle and the groom's sponsoring household typically provides grain. The groom's household also provides a dwelling hut located in their own compound, to be occupied by the new couple until they can move to a compound of their own.

Although a new couple may reside in the groom's natal compound, they will be expected to manage largely on their own, and to store and consume their grain separately. Common storage and consumption of grain is what, most fundamentally, defines a distinct household, and also implies that household members are engaged in common land husbandry. The National Census Office of Ethiopia defines a

¹⁹ See Appendix 8, Section 2.

household as a group who resides in a separate house, eats separately, and maintains separate resources. My own experience suggests the latter criterion is the most telling, since several households may reside in the same compound and eat together for convenience, but still store their grain separately and consider themselves to be distinct households.

Once individuals separate from their natal household upon marriage, they are called *guji wutsa*, or "new hutted". To become *guji wutsa* has a number of implications. It means that the new couple is responsible, as a distinct household, for making contributions to the parish church in their own right, as well as paying tax on land in their own name. In terms of public administration, a *guji wutsa* couple is expected to vote as a distinct unit from their natal households, and to speak with a distinct voice. It also implies that the head of the *guji wutsa* household will undertake the independent management of the household's landholding, and is thus free to enter into transactions with other heads of households for the exchange or loan of agricultural capital, such as oxen.

Female-headed households comprise approximately one-quarter of households in Enda Mariyam. This is a function of the strongly marked gender division of labour within Tigray households. Although a woman may live alone, it is extremely rare to find a man living alone. This is because Tigray men do not prepare food, and thus require a female to prepare their meals. A recently divorced or widowed man will quickly remarry, or return to his natal household until such time as he can find a female to incorporate into his household, typically through marriage. A recently divorced or widowed woman, on the other hand, can choose to remain in her husband's village and live alone. In practice, it is rare for a woman of childbearing age to remain living alone for long. Most of the female heads of households in Enda Mariyam were past childbearing age. Although they can live alone, the fact that women traditionally do not plough means that a female heading her own household will usually be forced to rent out her land, unless she has a son or other male relative of ploughing age.

Marriages are easily dissolved, and divorce is common. Bauer (1977: 126) estimated, for example, that the average marriage in Hareyna village lasted only 12.7 years.

Divorce is most common among newly-married couples, and is linked to the difficulties new households face in surviving economically, especially if they have been poorly-resourced by their sponsoring households.

The frequency of divorce and remarriage, together with adjustments of household composition in response to economic circumstance, mean that an individual is liable to pass through a number of different households in his or her lifetime. In this regard, while the household as social unit retains a primary place in Tigray social organisation, an individual Tigray household is not necessarily an enduring unit. Rather, individuals are liable to change their household affiliation over time. As Bauer (1975: 236) observes, "Offspring often leave to join other households, and new members are brought in as labor requirements dictate."

The fact that household membership is liable to change contributes to the lack of family dynasties among the Tigray peasantry. As noted earlier, the goal of young persons is to separate from their natal households and establish their own, independent households. A man will seek to be known by his own achievements, rather than his father's. Indeed, one way of making a man "low" is to call him by his father's name rather than his own. Similarly, Bauer (1977: 2) points out that, "Although a man would know his grandfather's name, he might not know what his position within the community had been." In consequence, there are no families that constitute a transgenerational entity in rural Tigray, with a past, a future, a reputation to preserve, and resources such as land to be passed relatively intact to the next generation. On the contrary, the formation and dissolution of households involves the combining and dividing of a portfolio of resources that are intact only as long as the household is intact.

4.3.2 Wider Social Relations

While the household is the most important unit of social reproduction, every individual also has a myriad of different extra-household affiliations. As well as a household member, an individual is also part of a *gorebet*, or neighbourhood, and will likely have formed bonds of close friendship with other persons in the neighbourhood or in the

village at large, whom they will call *fetawi*. They will also be part of a kin group, and - for the majority of Tigray peasants - members of the parish of the local Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

People who reside in the same *got* normally call each other *gorebet*, which can be glossed as "neighbour". Bauer (1973: 110) qualifies the nature of neighbourhood affiliation as follows:

The relationship between neighbors is normatively reciprocal and symmetrical and entails the duty to respond to hue and cry and the duty to help in the preparation of feasts.

In Enda Mariyam, members of the same *got* share a sense of common identity within the larger identity of the village and parish. In a setting characterised by nucleated settlements surrounded by geographic features such as steep slopes, this derives in part from experience of a common microclimate. In my own *got* of residence, for example, mud slides were a constant source of danger during rainy season months - a danger not shared by residents of Mahel Geza *got* only five minutes walk away.

More importantly, members of the same *got* are expected to attend each other's christenings, wedding, and funerals, and to provide labour on a reciprocal basis for tasks such as housebuilding or carrying a sick person to the district hospital. Failure to honour these obligations is grounds for criticism within the *got*, and the withdrawal of reciprocal support. Few households are able to manage without the ability to call upon their neighbours' labour in an emergency, and consequently there were few households in Enda Mariyam that did not maintain the minimum level of social obligation to others in the same *got*.

It is possible to divide the different *gots* in Enda Mariyam into smaller units, comprised of those compounds in close physical proximity to one another. When speaking to other members of the village, or to outsiders, informants typically use the word *gorebet* to mean those people resident in the same *got*. When speaking with persons from the same *got*, however, they may use *gorebet* - literally "close people" - to mean only those people they consider to be their immediate neighbours.

What the word *gorebet* signifies, however, depends on who is speaking. Women use the word *gorebet* most commonly to mean the households of other women with whom they have established a relationship of mutual support and friendship. Such households are almost always in close proximity, since women spend most of their time inside or close to the dwellings of their compound, especially the cooking hut (*da mogogo*). Women regularly seek the help of other women for such tasks as fueling an oven, grinding grain, fetching water, and cooking. Usually, women do not seek such assistance outside their immediate *gorebet*. One reason for this may be virilocal marriage. A woman newly arrived in a village will not herself approach other women for help but instead must wait until she is visited by neighbouring women, who bring coffee and bread. After this visit, she can reciprocate in kind. It is then possible for her to begin asking to borrow food items in small quantities, and to loan them herself. As relations with her *gorebet* develop, a woman may ask for help in fetching water or gathering fuel for cooking, and eventually for help in grinding grain, the most physically demanding task.

For men, *gorebet* are typically those households in close proximity, who can be counted on to provide labour on a reciprocal basis, and who are regularly invited to attend the monthly celebration of the day of the household saint, known as the *mezeker*. For a large *mezeker* celebration, guests from outside the *got* may also be invited, but the group of those invited from the *got* itself are seen to constitute a man's "neighbours". Usually, but not necessarily, these will comprise the heads of the ten or so households in close proximity. Because men prefer to build their compounds in the same *got* as their father, some of those who comprise a man's *gorebet* will also, usually, be his kin. Patrivirilocality is not a fixed rule, however, and there are exceptions. Nor is neighbourhood affiliation a fixed category of group membership. While relatively infrequent due to land shortage, there is no penalty or censure for changing one's *got* and re-establishing a new set of neighbours in a new location.

The residential boundaries of a village are often, but not always, co-terminous with the boundaries of a parish of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The parish of the Mariyam church includes all residents of Enda Mariyam village, as well as a small number of residents of Mai Woini and Enda Michael villages, in the same *tabiya*. The lack of exact fit is due to the fact that the Mariyam parish traditionally encompassed those

persons in the descent chain (*ahlet*) of the village's four original settlers, one of whom founded the church, according to local history. Since the end of the imperial period, administrative boundaries were re-established to delineate the *kushets* in a *tabiya*. Although roughly commensurate, these do not exactly mirror parish boundaries.

During the imperial period, the parish was also the smallest unit of political administration, governed by a *chika shum*, or headman. Members of the same parish shared common responsibility for delivering the total of taxes and tribute required by regional elites and the imperial state. At present, the parish is no longer a formally-recognised political unit.

Membership in the local parish provides perhaps the most significant extra-household sources of status and identity in Tigray social life. According to Bauer (1973: 91), most of a person's universal, non-contractual obligations are associated with two units: the household and the parish. Members of the same parish are under the protection of the same patron saint and share mutual responsibility for the moral and religious profile of the community, not least in terms of how the parish is judged by heavenly powers. Individuals who transgress an important religious prohibition not only risk misfortune for themselves, but for the parish at large.

Parish members are also obliged to work for the common good of the church and to ensure the church community is seen as pious in the eyes of outsiders. This includes the provision of annual and monthly gifts to enable the village to celebrate the most important holidays in the Ethiopian Orthodox calendar, and to support the number of clergy required for regular celebration of the mass. As long as an adult fulfils these obligations and performs the minimum of religious duties considered necessary to maintain the piety of the community, it does not much matter whether they actually attend church services.

Unlike parish membership, an individual's kin group does not usually constitute a source of identity or status. As noted earlier, an individual is largely judged by what they themselves achieve. The only exceptions are in cases where a person's father possessed a noble title, which still confers a degree of local honour upon the son. Otherwise, the kin group as such does not constitute the basis for either group identity or social action. The same is true of the cognatic descent group or groups to which

most individuals (with the exception of blacksmiths) belong. Although the majority of Enda Mariyam residents belong to one of four cognatic descent groups, traced through either male or female lines to an original settler, these groups were only meaningful in terms of social practice during the period when *risti* land tenure was in operation.

Even under *risti*, however, there was no solidarity of action among members of the same descent group. On the contrary, such members were often in conflict with one another over competing land claims. Hence, although cognatic descent systems do not preclude the formation of cohesive social groups organised on the basis of descent principles (see Keesing, 1975), such groups are not evident in Tigray.

Informants in Enda Mariyam say that, in theory, a person has the obligation to provide assistance, when asked, to both close (*haw*) and distant kin (*zemed*) if they are in serious need. Informants also say it is a good idea to maintain contact with as many kin as possible, so they can be called upon for support when needed.

In practice, most people lack the wherewithal to maintain relationships with many of their *zemed*. The continuation of a relationship with one's *zemed* is premised on continued reciprocity. So, for example, during a religious holiday an individual might visit a relative with freshly baked bread and food, but these visits will stop if that relative does not reciprocate in kind on another holiday. The only obligation that is regularly acted upon with regard to more distant kin is the obligation to attend their funeral, which is met as far as possible even over quite long distances.

Kin who are closely related (*haw*) have stronger obligations of mutual assistance. Informants in Enda Mariyam generally agreed that one's *haw* include - in abstract terms - siblings of either sex, parents, grandparents, mother's and father's siblings and their children, and step-siblings raised in the same household. Especially for those *haw* who have once been co-resident in the same household, mutual obligations include material support for weddings, christenings, and funerals, mutual aid in periods of difficulty, including the loan of cash or grain, and, historically, vengeance in cases of murder.

Despite its abstract definition, people in Enda Mariyam commonly use the word *haw* to refer to those specific consanguines with whom they have a close and mutually-supportive relationship. These are not necessarily all of the kin specified above. Rather, exactly who an individual calls *haw* depends largely on circumstances of residence, economics, and interest. Even kin who are distantly related may call each other *haw* if they live in close proximity, attend each other's christenings, weddings and funerals, provide economic assistance on a reciprocal basis when the need arises, and visit each other on the main religious holidays.

Conversely, just because two individuals are closely related does not automatically mean that a close relationship will actually exist between them. Rather, as Poluha (1989) points out, actual relations between individuals who are close kin is highly variable. Even when the homesteads of close kin are located in proximity, they may have no more special interaction than is normative for neighbours. According to Poluha (1989: 60), the quality of the relationship between women and their daughters-in-law largely determines the extent to which the households of close kin are actually close. More generally, it can be said that the actual relationship between kin depends less on ties or categories of blood or marriage, than on social interest and opportunity.

In her study of the Amhara of Ashena village in Gojjam, Poluha (1989) draws a distinction between village-level social relationships characterised by balanced reciprocity, as opposed to generalised reciprocity. These terms are worth considering for a moment, insofar as they provide a useful analytical tool for understanding Tigray social relationships.

Poluha borrows the terms from Sahlins (1972). In defining exchange relationships, Sahlins (1972: 279) pictures a set of concentric spheres radiating outward from "the close-knit inner circles of homestead and hamlet, extending thence to wider and more diffuse zones". Within the inner circles, according to Sahlins, generalised reciprocity is more likely to prevail: that is, a personalised exchange in which moral as opposed to economic considerations have greater weight, and where things are given without the expectation of a quick return of things of commensurate value.

As one moves farther away from the inner circle, exchange becomes less altruistic, more economic, and the need for balanced as opposed to uneven exchange increases. In balanced reciprocity, things of commensurate value are returned with little delay. Whereas, in generalised reciprocity, the failure to return a favour or gift does not necessarily result in the cessation of favours or gifts, in balanced reciprocity it does. This is because, in balanced reciprocity, "(t)he parties confront each other as distinct economic and social interests", where, "(t)he material side of the transaction is at least as critical as the social" (Sahlins, 1972: 195).

Poluha (1989) accepts Sahlins' distinction between generalised exchanges that appear more altruistic, since they do not necessarily stipulate how reciprocity is to occur, and balanced exchanges that appear more economic. However, instead of concentric spheres radiating out from generalised to balanced reciprocity, Poluha suggests that, in Ashena, social relationships are in flux, and two individuals may move from balanced to generalised reciprocity, or back again, depending on the nature and circumstance of their interaction over time. This is rather different from Sahlins' notion of discrete spheres of exchange, in which all individuals within the same sphere maintain the same form of reciprocity.

Poluha's use of the concepts of balanced and generalised reciprocity appears appropriate for the Tigray as well as the Amhara. It is possible to say, for example, that the majority of extra-household social relationships in Enda Mariyam are characterised by balanced reciprocity. This is not to say that altruism is absent in interpersonal relations, but rather that such relations are frequently informed by social and material, as well as moral, interests. As seen above, in the case of both neighbours and kin, if reciprocation is not maintained, then the relationship between two individuals of either category will usually lapse. Even within the household - the unit Sahlins considers the inner circle of altruism - obligations and rights must be kept in careful balance, and the household head spends much time managing intrapersonal household relationships. As Hoben (1970: 198) observes:

The idiom of the household is not primarily an idiom of kinship as it is in so much of sub-Saharan Africa. It is rather an idiom of politics and clientship.

At the same time, relationships between kin or neighbours can move from balanced to more generalised reciprocity over time, if there also develops, between the two individuals involved, a trusting friendship. According to Poluha (1989: 105), friendship in Ashena is of greater importance than might be expected, because:

...(t)he traditional inheritance system made kin contend for cultivation rights to the same pieces of land, thereby reducing their opportunities of becoming close to each other. This may have contributed to the fact that even close relatives never had very intimate relations and that friendship is so important in the community, particularly between men.

Male informants in Enda Mariyam say that a friend is someone with whom it is possible to share secrets, who will defend your reputation against public and private criticism, who will act as a guarantor (*wahas*) for loan agreements or in cases of dispute, who will provide favours, and who will give help in times of need. In many cases, close male friends are age mates who began their friendships at an early age. Although the word for "friend" in Tigrinya is *arki*, close male friends in Enda Mariyam more commonly refer to one another as *fetawi*, which can be loosely glossed as "ones who like or love each other". Women also call their close friends *fetawi*, but due to virilocal marriage a woman's *fetawi* are often her immediate neighbours with whom she has the most regular contact, rather than age mates.

In Enda Mariyam, bonds of close male friendship are not limited to age mates. In addition, there are also bonds of friendship between men of different age, in which there is a degree of economic and social dependence of the younger man upon the older. An example is the friendship between Alem Techliwoini, a well-to-do-farmer in Enda Mariyam, and a much poorer and younger farmer, Gerensay Yohanis, living in the same *got*. Gerensay's newly-established household is highly dependent on the economic patronage of Alem, who not only supports Gerensay but spends considerable amounts of time with him, because "he is my close friend". In exchange, Gerensay helps Alem with tasks around his homestead, and is one of Alem's fiercest defenders in both public and private.

This kind of mentoring relationship can be seen as one end of a spectrum of dyadic relationships based on uneven economic circumstances. In this particular case there

is a high degree of generalised reciprocity between Alem and Gerensay, who are close personal friends. In other cases, dyadic relationships of dependence are less altruistic and more clientalistic in nature. In subsequent chapters, dyadic exchange relationships are explored in more detail, both in terms of historic relations between patrons and clients, or "big men" and their followers, and in terms of present-day transactions for agricultural capital.

4.3.3 The Individual and the Group

As the discussion thus far has implied, Tigray village life is oriented around the individual and the household, rather than social groups. Status and identity, for example, derive primarily from individual achievement, either alone or as household head, rather than from membership in a particular group or category of persons. Although parish membership provides the most significant form of extra-household group affiliation, parish membership itself is elective. Once residence in a new village has been established, it is relatively easy to join the parish of a new church, requiring, according to Bauer (1973), only the demonstration of support for the church through the provision of gifts. Nor does membership in corporate or descent groups provide a basis for status and identity, or for social action.

Hence, despite commonly-held beliefs about the solidarity of groups within traditional societies, group solidarity among the Tigray is in fact relatively weak. Bauer (1975: 236) notes, for example, that Tigray society is characterised by "a weakness of corporate groups", insofar as few activities are carried out through the medium of corporations, and "those groups which do exist tend to show little solidarity".²⁰ Similarly, Hoben (1970: 202) notes:

The high degree of structural individuation in Amhara social organization is consistent with the observed low degree of individual commitment to any of the groups of which he is a member. This low degree of group solidarity is evident in the paucity of group symbols, in the very limited amount of ritual activity

²⁰ Bauer (1975) uses "corporate group" without providing a specific definition, but we can assume he means groups with presumptive perpetuity, group identity, rules of membership, internal structure, and common affairs.

specifically associated with any group except the parish, in the near absence of group-imposed sanctions, and, above all, in the inability of groups to undertake or bring to fruition cooperative activity unless their members are individually exhorted to action by an authority figure who characteristically exerts his influence, not as a leading member of the group, but through a role unrelated to group membership.

The lack of group solidarity in Tigray social organisation is also evident in the absence of social strata. In northern Ethiopia, social ties were not concentrated within strata, but between individuals and households. Bauer (1977) asserts, for example, that there were no permanent, polarised classes of rich and poor in Hareyna. Although there were substantial differences in levels of wealth, individuals and households were continually changing their positions relative to one another. Further, although the gulf between them was large, the rich and the poor did not consider themselves to be different categories of people, with different goals and interests.

In this regard, Bauer's ethnographic description of Hareyna is in contrast to a view of pre-war society as divided into distinct economic classes, linked to different forms of land rights. This is a view found, for example, in much of the early writing on the Tigray revolution (see Tekeste Agazi, 1983; Firebrace and Smith, 1982). However, as Tareke (1991: 73) observes:

In Ethiopia, resource distribution - amount of land, size of animal herds, type and quantity of equipment, and income - largely determined the socioeconomic status of rural families, but political behaviour did not always correspond to one's economic position. This is because classes were dynamic social categories the members of which may or may not, fully or partly, have been conscious of their identical interests. What diverted attention from group concerns was people's claims to multiple identities and their involvement in dual or more economic activities... In the peasant economy, many people were at the same time owner/cultivator and part-tenant.

Tareke's remark points to a feature of Tigray social organisation that helps explain the weak solidarity of social groups. That is, the fact that every person has a myriad of potential affiliations which he or she can activate, depending on the specific situation. Hoben (1970) suggests that this potential multiplicity of affiliations militates against an individual committing themselves very strongly to any single group. Similarly, Bauer (1977: 2) notes that, "the individual in Hareyna faces relations of almost constant fluidity such that he is seldom part of a strong corporate group."

The multiplicity of ties that every individual faces is underlined by the dynamics of cognatic descent. As Holy (1996) notes, a cognatic descent system offers the individual the chance to identify with a particular group according to circumstance and advantage, without sacrificing potential future membership in other groups. Although cognatic descent groups did not form the basis for social action in Tigray except in relation to claims to *risti* land, the operating principles of cognatic descent probably encouraged what can be called an *ethos* of optation in Tigray social life. That is, individuals are oriented toward a high degree of autonomy in choosing which social relationships they maintain and which they allow to lapse. Calls to social action based on appeals to group solidarity usually have little effect if individuals are not predisposed toward that action for some other reason.

Bauer (1976: 136) identifies another factor in the weakness of corporate groups - the nature of the Tigray farming system, and the ecological and environmental setting for production:

Tigray technology demands little team effort. There are no wet paddies to plant...where well-coordinated teams are required. Nor are there economies of scale in harvesting...The technological, ecological and economic constraints in farming...fail to encourage corporate ties.

In Enda Mariyam, there are no aspects of the farming enterprise that can genuinely be characterised as co-operative. Every household operates more or less as a distinct production unit, within a cultural idiom that values individual, as opposed to group, achievement. As Bauer (1977: 3) observes, " 'God helps those who help themselves' might be a good way to characterize the Tigray *ethos*". Even when individuals from different households pool their labour for tasks such as weeding, there is always the expectation of reciprocity on an individual basis for each participating worker. If this expectation is not met, the individual who failed to reciprocate will not be invited to pool labour in the future, nor can they expect to easily attract additional labour themselves. Similarly, Poluha (1989: 108) notes that the most important element for the success of work groups (*wubera*) among the Amhara of Ashena is that "balanced reciprocity in all aspects must prevail."

This is not to say, however, that there is no interdependence between households in the farming enterprise. On the contrary, despite a government-sponsored credit programme aimed at providing households with agricultural inputs, including oxen, the majority of Enda Mariyam households get the inputs they need through exchange or loan arrangements with other households in the village. In this regard, the relatively high degree of interdependence between households in the farming enterprise is characterised by dyadic exchanges between individuals, rather than by allegiance to, or membership in, broader social groupings.

In general, it is possible to say that the multiplicity of affiliations open to every individual, and the associated weakness of corporate groups, fits well with the pursuit of a livelihood in the Tigray setting. In a context where household economic viability is fragile, and where the resources available to the household are in flux, it helps individuals to have a significant degree of autonomy in managing the profile of their social relationships. At the same time, individuals must manage the profile of their social relationships wisely. The extent to which a household can obtain access to key productive inputs is largely a function of the nexus of social relationships at its disposal. Household heads who maintain wider sets of social relationships have a better chance of negotiating access to scarce farm capital than those who do not, because they have a wider area across which to cast their net when seeking exchange agreements.

CHAPTER 2 - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. Introduction

This chapter aims to situate the experience of peasant farmers in Enda Mariyam in a broader historical context, by describing key aspects of the Tigray revolution.

Much has been written about the political transition in Ethiopia from imperial rule under Emperor Haile Selassie to rule, after 1974, by a committee of military officers known as the Derg. With regard to this transition at local level, scholarly studies have focused on attempts by the Derg to re-organize the peasant sector according to a socialist model derived mainly from the Soviet Union, who became the key political backer of the state after 1978. These attempts included, first and foremost, the Land Reform Proclamation of 1975, which abolished all pre-existing rights in land, outlawed tenancy and agricultural wage labour, and led to state confiscation of large landholdings. After 1975, state policies concerning the peasant sector became increasingly interventionist and politicized. As Bruce, Hoben, and Rahmato (1993: 2) observe:

Radical land reform came to serve the broader agenda of agricultural transformation that eventually included agrarian socialization and the rapid promotion of producers and service cooperatives, villagization, grain requisitioning, the suppression of private trade in favor of the state-run Agricultural Marketing Cooperative, state-owned large-scale mechanized farms, and massive interregional resettlement. After the first few years, and in particular after 1978 when the Derg embraced a hard-line Stalinist policy, implementation of all rural reform programs was highly authoritarian and top-down, with very little room for local participation or feedback. This top-down approach, and the means of coercion and control of the rural population (as well as of production) which the Derg employed indiscriminately right up to the last year before its downfall eventually undermined the government's agrarian programs and led to loss and wastage of rural resources on a large scale.

Aside from an initial and somewhat patchy round of land reform, however, the Derg was unable to impose its agenda for agrarian socialism in Tigray. As Young (1997) notes, in the years directly after the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie, the Derg was slow to gain control of the organs of state, especially in more peripheral areas. By the time the Derg solidified control in Tigray, the TPLF had already emerged as an armed

opposition movement, and had already established relations with much of the peasantry. From approximately the late 1970s forward, as it gained ascendancy over other armed opposition groups, the TPLF expanded its base of rural support. By the early 1980s, the TPLF had mobilised large numbers of peasants to fight against the Derg, and was in control of large areas of the countryside (Smith, 1987).

Faced with a growing armed insurgency, the Derg abandoned many of its policies aimed at re-organising rural production, and concentrated instead on programmes aimed at undermining the peasant sector, which provided the bulk of TPLF combatants and the basis of its political support. In addition to military offensives that targeted grain surplus-producing areas, this included population resettlement from Tigray to the south of the country, and the interdiction of famine relief supplies to TPLF-controlled areas (Africa Watch, 1991). As towns became increasingly isolated islands of government control, urban economies were effectively cut-off from articulation with rural areas and re-oriented toward service provision to army garrisons. In the "liberated" countryside, meanwhile, the TPLF implemented its own set of political and economic reforms.

Hence, from approximately the early 1980s forward, much of Tigray experienced a distinct historical trajectory.²¹ Rural areas were the site of an administrative system that was distinct in both form and content from the one established by the Derg elsewhere in the country. This system would prove remarkably effective in mobilizing the rural population to prosecute the war and in implementing reform measures.

Little of Tigray's recent history has been systematically studied, however. In terms of the Tigray revolution itself, there are very few sources available. The notable exception is Young (1995, 1997), who produced a first history of the revolution. Chiari's short study (1996) of the TPLF land reform is also important in this regard.

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide more than a summary account of the

²¹ For the purposes of this discussion, the Eritrean war of independence, from 1961 to 1991, is excluded. A former Italian colony, Eritrea was deemed a UN protectorate after World War II. In 1962, Emperor Haile Selassie unilaterally annexed the territory to Ethiopia. In May 1994, after thirty years of armed resistance, the territory was formally declared an independent state, after a UN-sponsored referendum.

revolution, notwithstanding the difficulties a lack of source material creates for such an undertaking. Rather, the chapter concentrates on those issues of direct relevance to the study - namely, the reform measures introduced by the TPLF during the war. In this regard, particular attention is paid to the TPLF's land reform. After initial contact by TPLF political cadres, land reform was the first programme of the revolution to be introduced in rural villages; it is also the reform measure that had the most far-reaching implications for rural social life. The chapter also considers the establishment of a new administrative system, centred on the creation of local people's councils.

Before examining these aspects of the Tigray revolution, however, it is important to contextualise events within a broader framework. Although the TPLF was engaged in a military contest with the Derg, its reform programme sought to transform a rural society that was still fundamentally that of the late imperial period. The chapter thus begins with a consideration of key aspects of the social world of the *ancien regime*.

2. The Social World of the *Ancien Regime*

With its twin institutions of imperial throne and Orthodox Church, Ethiopia prior to 1974 was often characterised as bearing a resemblance to medieval Western Europe. Levine (1965: ix-x), for example, refers to northern Ethiopia as "a gate through time to a state of being that is richly medieval". Although the imperial state incorporated many diverse peoples, cultures, and religions, such representations typically refer to the northern highlands of Abyssinia populated predominantly by the Amhara and the Tigray.

2.1 The View From Above

The political structure of imperial Ethiopia emanated downward from the Imperial Throne. The Emperor was head of the two ruling hierarchies - secular and ecclesiastical - that constituted the backbone of the imperial state. Anointed and crowned by the archbishop of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the absolute monarchy

of the Emperor was legitimised by belief in his descent from King Solomon, and his right of divine rule as the elect of God (Hoben, 1970). In maintaining the legitimacy of imperial rule, the Ethiopic Church played a key role. As Tareke (1991: 67) notes:

The church sanctioned the hierarchical order of society which, it claimed, consisted of the trinity, namely the *negash* (those who ruled: monarchy), *kedash* (those who served the church/prayed: clergy), and *arash* (those who tilled the land: peasantry). Not only were social distinctions affirmed, but those who ruled were invested with special qualities: not only were they descendants of the kings of Israel, but they were also divinely chosen. As the chosen of God, they were entitled to total submission from their subjects, and in this way power was invested with authority.

Below the Imperial Throne was the nobility (*mekwannet*). With regard to Amhara society, Hoben (1970: 205) notes that in the most general sense the nobility constituted all those men who held office in the secular or ecclesiastical hierarchies. Before the 20th century, individual powerful noblemen led personal armies and were the basis for a diffuse and personalised imperial military structure. The personalised nature of a nobleman's authority over others is described by Hoben (1970: 208):

The high status of an Amhara lord was made tangible in all social settings through numerous forms of deferential etiquette. The dominant themes expressed overtly and symbolically in all these forms of deferential behavior was one of unlimited and personal dependence on the lord.

The most powerful nobleman in the empire ruled entire provinces or regions through governorships granted by the Emperor. Provincial governors typically held the highest-ranking among the quasi-military titles of the nobility, including Ras ("commander of an army") and Dejazmach ("commander of the centre") (Bauer, 1973: 20). Such titles were conferred by the Emperor. The conferring and retracting of governorships amongst rival lords was one way successive Emperors controlled the provincial nobility, and ensured allegiance to the Imperial Throne.

Although governorships were not usually inheritable, in some provinces they remained concentrated in the hands of a small number of hereditary ruling families. In Tigray, whose ruling nobility had historical claims to the Emperorship itself, rival families fought for control of the province during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By 1920, two families had emerged as most powerful, each headed by a

Ras who was a grandson of Emperor Yohanis IV, and each appointed as governor to half the province. In the aftermath of Italian occupation, Emperor Haile Selassie re-appointed one of them - Ras Seyoum Mengesha - as Governor General of Tigray (Tareke, 1991).

Below provincial governorships were a variety of other offices. Prior to the administrative reforms of the early 20th century, these were extremely variable, largely because the territories they administered - and indeed the boundaries of the provinces themselves - were divided and re-divided in various ways according to the ups and downs of provincial politics and imperial power (Hoben, 1970: 205). After the mid-20th century, when Emperor Haile Selassie returned to power after the Italian occupation, political offices were standardised throughout the country. Below provincial governorships were governorships of counties (*awraja* in Tigrinya) and districts (*wereda* in Tigrinya). In Tigray, the lowest level of administration with formal responsibility to the state was the parish (Bauer, 1973).

Prior to the 20th century, the power and privileges of the nobility were based on rights of taxation and tribute over estates of land, known as *gwilti* in Tigrinya. These rights were granted by the Imperial Throne to members of the nobility as rewards for loyal service, or to ecclesiastical institutions as endowments. Individual *gwilti* grants were normatively not inheritable, but reverted to the Throne upon the death of the individual; ecclesiastical *gwilti* tended to accumulate over many centuries, as each Emperor in turn conferred it upon churches and monasteries (see Bruce, 1976). According to Bruce, most of the *gwilti* in Tigray was held by churches and monasteries, and only a relatively small amount was held by individuals. Bruce (1976) attributes this to the desire of Amhara rulers in the 19th century to weaken the Tigray nobility.

According to Tareke, *gwilti* provided the administrative framework within which the imperial domain was organized for surplus extraction (Tareke, 1991: 65). A *gwilti* grant bestowed proprietary rights over the estates of land included in the grant, including the right to tax those who farmed it and the right to administrative and judicial authority over those who lived on it (Hoben, 1975: 161). Hence, *gwilti* did not confer rights to the land itself but to the wealth the land produced. Nevertheless, *gwilti*

is sometimes treated in the literature as a form of land tenure in its own right. However, the predominant form of land tenure in northern Ethiopia was called *risti* (see below). *Gwilti* grants typically did not confer control over land, but rather rights of benefice over the produce of land held by peasants under *risti* tenure (see Bruce, 1976).

Secular and ecclesiastical elites thus relied on tribute and tax collection, rather than on rents (McCann, 1995). As long as rural producers met their taxation and tribute requirements, elites had little interest in interfering with the process of production itself. As McCann (1995: 240) notes:

If the imperial court and rural elite fed themselves and their functionaries on products of the agrarian economy, they exercised little if any direct influence on agriculture...(they) intensified and focused demand but did not fundamentally alter the technology or cropping patterns of small farmers.

Although *gwilti* was the common source of their economic and political power, the secular nobility of northern Ethiopia could not be said to have constituted a distinct corporate stratum. For one thing, the formal titles, *gwilti* rights, and political offices that marked their status were normatively not inheritable. Although a man might be acknowledged as having had a nobleman for a father, he could not expect to inherit any of the political influence or economic privilege that his father enjoyed. Further, despite differences in status, quality of lifestyle, and forms of etiquette, the social world of the Abyssinian nobleman was not fundamentally distinct from that of the peasant. As Hoben (1970: 193) observes:

The Amhara farmer and his lord did not consider themselves to be of different breed or blood. Often they claimed descent from a common ancestor and acknowledged bilaterally traced ties of kinship. Nor were their aspirations so very different, for the Amhara military ethos, with its promise of rewards of land and title for daring conduct in battle, was shared by all.

Hoben (1970: 205) suggests that the failure of the northern nobility to articulate a set of common interests was primarily a function of the way power was located in individuals, rather than in stations or offices. Loyalty and deference were accorded to the lord himself, rather than to an impersonal principle of administration, or an abstract notion of social station (see Hoben, 1970: 209). The hierarchical order of imperial society was thus not so much a function of the existence of distinct strata, as

of individual ties of patronage and clientship, "between persons who have access to political office and land, and those who depend upon them" (Hoben, 1970: 194).

2.2 The View From Below

Below the nobility was the great mass of the farming peasantry, who encompassed a range of different situations and wealth, from the "big men" of the rural gentry down to the poorest peasant household. Aside from artisans and Muslim traders, the northern highland peasantry were smallholder cultivators.

The highland agricultural system is based on household cultivation of small plots using a wooden plough drawn by a team of oxen. McCann (1995) calls this system the ox-plough farming complex. Tigray is one of the oldest parts of the complex. Although it originated in the northern highlands, the ox-plough farming system spread southward, and eventually transformed virtually all smallholder agriculture in Ethiopia (McCann, 1995). The particular features of this system as it operates in present-day Enda Mariyam are described in the next chapter. Here, it is important to note that the ox-plough farming system supported a high population density and provided the economic foundation that, in McCann's (1995: 4) words, "put food on the tables of large, complex states... for at least two millennia".

The most prevalent form of land tenure in the north was known as *rist* in Amharic and *risti* in Tigrinya. Bruce (1976: 37) notes that *risti* tenure was found "mainly in the provinces of Tigray, Begemdir and Simien, and Gojjam, and in parts of Wello and Shewa". In addition to *risti*, a second but less extensive tenure system existed in Tigray known as *chiguraf gwoses*, wherein land rights were based on residence rather than on descent. Bruce (1976) argues that when village communities faced a serious drop in population, they could attract new settlers by switching to *chiguraf gwoses*, since any resident of more than six months was entitled to a share of village land under this system. When a village reached an ideal population, it could discourage new in-migrants by reverting back to *risti*.

Under *risti*, an individual held rights to land by virtue of their descent through either male or female lines from a founding ancestor who originally settled the land. In some

cases, a single *risti* estate was coterminous with the boundaries of a single village. In other cases, a village might comprise several *risti* estates.

Risti land was not privately held; it could not, for example, be sold or mortgaged (although it could be rented), and a peasant holding *risti* had usufruct rights only. Nevertheless, an individual's right to cultivate portions of the estates of their ancestors was fundamental and could not be abrogated. In this regard, *risti* provided a theoretical right of access to land, regardless of whether or not an individual had the wherewithal to act on that right. As Pausewang (1983: 21) notes:

The term *rist* also has the connotation of the social security rooted in the inalienable right to membership in, and therefore to the resources of, one's community of descent. This right cannot be terminated, irrespective of whether or not an individual lives in, or has ever even visited, the community or whether he or she may be cultivating in another community where he or she also holds *rist*.

Because *risti* guaranteed access to the resources of one's community of descent, it militated against landlessness. The only groups without rights in land were members of endogamous artisan groups, such as blacksmiths and potters, and Muslims; both of these groups tended to rely on tenancies for access to land (Tareke, 1991).

Risti did not confer on an individual the rights to a particular plot or plots of land but rather to an unspecified share of the total estate of the founding ancestor. Thus, although a peasant never lost his *risti* rights, he might actually hold a changing configuration of plots as *risti* in the course of his lifetime. One reason for this was the normative rule of equal partitioning. There were no "family estates" in the Tigray-Amhara social system that were passed intact to succeeding generations. Rather, parental holdings were broken up in order to provide, at least in theory, each child (male and female) with a basic landholding.

Local level politics in imperial Ethiopia mirrored that of higher levels. Local political power was largely encompassed within personal ties of dependence between patrons and clients, or between "big men" (*abi seb*) and their followers. Big men typically controlled large amounts of arable land and held one of a number of local offices. Often, but not necessarily, they possessed noble titles. It is at this level that the lower

ranks of the nobility merged with the upper realms of the peasantry. For example, several noblemen of relatively low-ranking title lived in villages neighbouring Enda Mariyam prior to the revolution. Although they held no *gwilti* grants, informants refer to them as *mesfints*, or "lords".²² Aside from their titles, however, there was little to distinguish such men from the local gentry of rich peasants. Both typically held large amounts of *risti* land, and both often held local offices.

Big men wielded significant local power. Whereas at provincial level, political power was mainly a function of the ability to bestow rewards in the form of office, title, and rights of benefice (*gwilti*), at local level it was a function of the ability to bestow access to the resources necessary for agricultural production. A minority of big men typically controlled the majority of these resources, including land. They provided their supporters with loans of grain and oxen, and with food - including meat - in the context of feasts. In exchange, the dependants of a big man provided him with labour, political support, displays of deference, and in many cases access to additional land through rental agreements.

After big men, the vast majority of peasants were smallholding farmers, many of whom owned no oxen and held unviably small plots. Few of these farming households could meet subsistence requirements without dependence on richer patrons. Especially from the early 20th century forward, the northern peasantry became progressively impoverished as a consequence of a long-term process of land degradation and shorter-term processes of political change and upheaval. The severe poverty of the northern peasantry, culminating in the famine of 1972-74, was to be one of the factors triggering the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie, and the end of imperial Ethiopia.

²² The word *mesfint* was also applied to the sons of titled nobles who, although they possessed no title themselves, retained some of the honour of their fathers. More recently, the word has come to mean any member of the rural gentry who held large amounts of land and/or office. The word has also become politicised since the revolution. Younger informants in Enda Mariyam use *mesfint* to mean those who were rich prior to the arrival of the TPLF, and who resisted the TPLF's reform agenda.

3. Overview of Historical Events

3.1 The Imperial State in Crisis

When Emperor Haile Selassie returned to power in 1941 after the defeat of the Italians, he set in motion a series of reform efforts aimed at modernising the agrarian economy of Ethiopia, while at the same time strengthening his own authority. As Tareke (1991) notes, these efforts were met with resistance in Tigray from both peasants and provincial nobility. For peasants, Haile Selassie's fiscal reforms involved a significant shift from prior arrangements. Whereas previously, collection and payment of taxes had been organised by the village community and paid largely in kind, fiscal reforms effectively shifted the basis of taxation to individual, monetary payments. Having experienced a relatively benign tax regime under Italian rule, peasants were resistant to return to the burden of excessive taxation they had known under the Emperor. Moreover, as Young (1997) notes, taxes were frequently collected by corrupt assessors. Tareke (1996) suggests the veniality of tax assessors, and the abuse of political office by corrupt administrators, were key factors disposing the Tigray peasantry toward rebellion.

For the nobility, the Emperor's reforms were hardly less welcome. Decrees enacted shortly after the return of the Emperor prevented nobles from appointing their own administrative officials, and from raising their own armies (Tareke, 1991). More significantly, a 1967 tax proclamation abolished the right of all *gwilti*-holders, with the exception of ecclesiastical institutions, to collect taxes from their estates (Tareke, 1991). This measure cut directly into the basis of the northern nobility's power and privilege, and was bitterly resented.

In reaction, Tigray nobles encouraged peasant resistance (Young, 1997). In 1943, resistance erupted into revolt when a temporary alliance of some sectors of the nobility and peasantry revolted against the Emperor. This revolt, known as the *Woyane*, was harshly defeated with British assistance. In punishment, Haile Selassie ordered the boundaries of Tigray redrawn to exclude Raya and Azebo from the province. Although it was mainly an action to preserve provincial and local autonomy

(see Tareke, 1991), the *Woyane* would be used by the TPLF as a potent symbol of Tigray national resistance.²³

Meanwhile, rural poverty was deepening. In Tigray, it was exacerbated by violent rule in the aftermath of revolt. However, rural impoverishment was not only the result of political events. It was also the result of a much longer-term process of degradation of the natural resource base after centuries of agriculture. As Campbell (1991: 6) observes, central to this process, particularly in the 20th century, was sedentarization based around ox-plough cereal cropping, and continuous population growth.

Tareke (1991) suggests that the imperial state finally collapsed under the weight of the agrarian crisis. Attempts by the state to disassemble the traditional system met with strong resistance from elites whose position depended on the preservation of traditional rights. The state was thus largely unable to abolish the intermediate stratum of nobility in order to directly re-organise rural production, without threatening its own base of power. As Tareke (1991) observes, the state largely compromised with traditional elites in order to ensure its own survival, while at the same time increasing the pressure of surplus extraction on an impoverished peasantry. In so doing, however:

...it only succeeded in fueling class and national tensions that led to an uprising on its eastern periphery...The rebellion in Bale...was the prelude to the social upheaval that eventually swept both monarchical absolutism and feudalism into the dustbin of history (Tareke, 1991: 85).

3.2 The Advent of the Derg; the Formation of the TPLF

Haile Selassie's modernising reforms, and especially moves to rationalise the state bureaucracy, helped facilitate the growth of a relatively new class of urban professionals and petite bourgeoisie (Young, 1997), including members of the armed forces. In addition, increasing numbers of students at Haile Selassie (later Addis Ababa) University were becoming radicalised as the literature of Marx and Lenin became increasingly available. These various groups constituted the backbone of urban discontent with, and protest against, imperial rule from the 1960s forward.

²³ In fact, most informants in Enda Mariyam refer to the TPLF as the *Woyane*.

However, it was a small group of military officers known as the Derg who, after months of serious unrest in the national capital, imprisoned the Emperor on September 12, 1974, and assumed state power.²⁴

Shortly after seizing power, the Derg declared its aim of establishing a socialist Ethiopia. After an initial period of optimism, civilian groups led mainly by university students began calling on the Derg to form a "people's government" (see Ofcansky and Berry, 1993). After an internal power struggle between different officers, some of whom were sympathetic to civilian demands, Menghistu Haile Mariyam emerged in 1977 as the undisputed strongman of the Derg. Menghistu declared his aim to continue the fight against "secessionist" rebels in the territory of Eritrea. In a famous speech of April 17, 1977, Menghistu formally announced a campaign of violence against "the enemies of the revolution" (Africa Watch, 1991). This campaign, known as the Red Terror, was waged in major towns and cities throughout Ethiopia and resulted in the death of upwards of 10,000 people (Africa Watch, 1991).

In Tigray, the main targets of the Red Terror campaign were students and teachers. These groups had been at the forefront of urban opposition to the imperial regime in the 1960s and early 1970s. In addition to protest against the lack of education and employment opportunities (see Young, 1997), urban discontent in Tigray also had a nationalist flavour. From the period after the Emperor's return to power in 1941 forward, there had been a marked lack of state investment in economic development for the region. Moreover, many employment opportunities required fluency in the national language, Amharic. This, combined with specific instances of discrimination, meant that the northern political opposition could call upon Tigray nationalism as an organising force. Tigray nationalism encompassed a deep-seated sense of grievance over the marginalisation of the nobility from access to the Emperorship after the rise of Menelik II, as well as grievances over economic neglect and underdevelopment of the province (see Firebrace and Smith, 1982).

²⁴ "Derg" is an Amharic word meaning "committee" or "council" (see Ofcansky and Berry, 1993). The Derg originally comprised some 120 officers, none above the rank of major, and was led by Major Menghistu Haile Mariyam.

Nationalism was a key component of political opposition among Tigray students at Addis Ababa University. In the early 1970s, a group of Tigray student leaders at Addis Ababa University had formed the Tigray National Union. This group was reformed into the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which launched its armed struggle for national liberation on February 18, 1975. The leadership of the TPLF were mainly student activists, but also included teachers from towns in Tigray. The links between activists at Addis Ababa University and secondary school teachers and students in Tigray had already been established in the period from approximately 1971 forward. As Young (1997) notes, after 1975 the decision of these groups to join the TPLF was little different from the decision of many other educated Ethiopians to oppose the Derg, especially when it became clear that the Derg had no intention of relinquishing power to a "people's government".

Although the earliest members of the TPLF were mainly students and teachers, the Derg's violent tactics for countering political opposition drove increasing numbers of urban Tigray into its ranks. In this regard, the Red Terror campaign proved decisive. In rural areas, peasants were seriously alarmed at aspects of the Derg's 1975 Land Reform Proclamation, which outlawed wage-labour, and by the nationalisation of commercial farms in the west of the province. Both these measures served to curtail a critical source of income, especially for poorer peasants.

As Derg policies in Tigray became harsher, disaffection with its administration grew, leading in turn to growing support for armed insurgency. The TPLF was not the only organisation to offer such a programme, however. Before it emerged as the strongest and most coherent rebel force in the province, the TPLF fought for supremacy with two other groups: the leftist EPRP, which had been a target of the Derg's Red Terror campaign in Addis Ababa and whose survivors had regrouped to launch guerrilla warfare in the north, and the rightist EDU, which represented the interests of the deposed provincial nobility. By 1978, these forces were effectively defeated in Tigray (Firebrace and Smith, 1982), and the TPLF concentrated its military efforts on the war against the Derg.

3.3 Warfare and Famine

The TPLF began its war in the west of Tigray but expanded relatively quickly toward the northeast in order to introduce its land reform programme to an area known for land shortages (Young, 1997). By the early 1980s, the TPLF had established relatively secure areas of control in the west, central and parts of the east of the province.

In areas under its control, the TPLF made a concerted drive to mobilise rural communities to support the armed struggle. In the period from approximately 1980 to 1984, peasant recruits to the Front grew rapidly, and the foundations of the TPLF's rural administration were established. As a result, the military initiative lay primarily with the TPLF at this time. The Derg's strategy comprised aerial bombardments of "liberated" areas and ground offensives launched into the countryside from garrison towns along the main road system. The size of these offensives grew steadily from 1980, when an estimated 40,000 government troops were stationed in the province, to 70,000 troops in 1983 (Wright, 1983).

The advent of drought-associated famine conditions in the mid-1980s temporarily turned the tide of the war in the Derg's favour, by providing it with an additional weapon. One component of the Derg's strategic use of famine was the targeting of ground offensives against those parts of western Tigray that were still producing a relative grain surplus (see Hendrie, 1989), and the use of both ground and air forces to attack rebel supply lines and interdict the transport of relief goods from eastern Sudan (see Africa Watch, 1991).²⁵

These measures did not lead to the defeat of the TPLF, however, or the destruction of its base of peasant support. In late 1984, the TPLF organised an evacuation of famine-affected peoples from "liberated" areas to eastern Sudanese refugee camps; in 1986 and 1987, these populations returned to villages in Tigray (Africa Watch, 1991). In addition, the establishment of feeding centres in western Tigray provided assistance for up to 500,000 displaced people, under TPLF auspices (Peberdy,

²⁵ Relief aid was discreetly channelled to "liberated" areas by a small number of international non-governmental organisations since the early 1980s (see Duffield and Prendergast, 1994).

1985). As a result, the TPLF was able to maintain relatively intact the rural administration it had established in the early 1980s, and to provide material support to those peasants caught up in the famine. These efforts further solidified peasant support for the Front.

Militarily, however, the TPLF did not regain the initiative until 1987, when new territory, including major towns, were brought under its control. The TPLF's efforts to mobilise populations in the far south and east of the province had gained momentum by this time (see Young, 1997). After a series of major battles, the Derg retreated from the provincial capital of Makele on February 25, 1989.

After the defeat of the Derg's army in Tigray, and commensurate sized defeats of the Derg by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) in Eritrea, events cascaded rapidly. In May 1989, generals in the Ethiopian army mutinied. In March 1990, Menghistu announced a series of economic and political reforms intended to stave off the collapse of his government. These measures came too late, however, to do more than disrupt local-level state administration, as peasants began demolishing producers co-operatives and other institutions of agrarian socialism (Young, 1997).

In February 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of anti-government forces led by the TPLF, announced the start of a major push southward from Tigray. By April, EPRDF forces had captured the provinces of Gojjam and Gondar. On May 21, 1991, Menghistu fled the country, and on May 28, the EPRDF entered Addis Ababa and two months later established the Transitional Government of Ethiopia.

3.4 Gaining Peasant Support

One of the distinguishing features of the TPLF as a political movement was its recognition of the importance of establishing and maintaining a widespread peasant constituency. Without peasant support, the TPLF could not prosecute the war on a long-term basis, nor achieve any of its transformative goals. As Young (1997: 172) notes:

In an environment where the Derg and most revolutionary movements treated peasants with contempt, the TPLF leadership understood that success depended on its ability to maintain the unwavering commitment of the peasantry.

There are various factors that help explain why the peasantry supported the TPLF. One of these is the way the TPLF appealed to a sense of Tigray national identity, and nationally based grievances. The use of Tigrinya as the language of local government in "liberated areas" was a significant element of this.

Further, TPLF cadres were well-disciplined and respectful of local practices. Young (1995: 74) suggests that peasant support for the Front only really began to develop when cadres demonstrated their commitment to peasant welfare by living with them and sharing their deprivations.

Another important factor was the TPLF's capacity to establish law and order in its areas of control. Especially following the chaotic period after the downfall of the imperial regime, when *shifta* (bandit) raids on rural villages were rife, many peasants were grateful for the military security that TPLF provided (Young, 1995). Indeed, by the early 1980s, the situation in TPLF-controlled areas had become relatively stable. Although aerial bombardments caused significant loss of life and the destruction of property, they did not disaggregate rural communities; famine-associated distress migrations were far more disruptive in this regard. As one set of visitors observed:

...unlike many other conflict situations, visitors to rebel areas of Eritrea and Northern Ethiopia found a civil society that was essentially intact, having adapted to war conditions, and a regional administration that was both coherent and co-operative (Silkin and Hendrie, 1997: 168).

It is doubtful, however, whether these factors alone would have been sufficient to ally the peasantry behind the TPLF if they had not been accompanied by a policy of support for peasant livelihoods that represented a reversal of historic trends. Unlike the period of imperial rule, and the brief interlude of Derg administration, the TPLF did not extract any resources from rural producers in the form of taxes, nor did it require rural communities to feed, house, and generally support its combatants. Instead, it aimed to be self-supporting in food production, in order to relieve the burden on local

economies. Moreover, from at least the early 1980s forward, the TPLF engaged in a programme of active assistance to these economies, through the distribution of relief commodities and the provision of agricultural rehabilitation inputs (Duffield and Prendergast, 1994; Hendrie, 1989). The establishment of primary health care and education in areas where such services were virtually unknown was also important as a practical demonstration of the TPLF's intent to improve rural standards of living.

Whatever the decisive balance between these factors may have been, the TPLF was successful in obtaining the commitment of the vast majority of the peasantry to armed revolution under its auspices. This included participation in local-level activities, as well as a willingness of households to send their sons - and, increasingly, their daughters - to the TPLF to be trained as fighters (see Hammond, 1989). By the early 1980s, a majority of rank-and-file TPLF combatants were from peasant backgrounds (see Firebrace and Smith, 1982).

It was within this context that specific reform measures were carried out. There is little doubt that the TPLF was also successful in the implementation of these measures. With few exceptions, visitors to liberated Tigray during the war describe a civil society organised according to the same principles of governance and administration and, with minor local variation, participating in the same revolutionary reform agenda (see Wright, 1983; Firebrace and Smith, 1982).

4. Revolutionary Reform

4.1 Aims of a Transformative Project

The TPLF (1981: 2) described itself as:

... a people's democratic front fighting for the national self-determination of the Tigrean people and waging a people's democratic revolution.

The two objectives of the TPLF - to prosecute the war against the Derg, and to transform Tigray through a "people's democratic revolution" - were pursued side by side. As Young (1997) observes, this meant that the TPLF had to balance its goal of

social transformation of a predominantly peasant society against the requirements of an armed insurgency which depended on the support of that peasantry to succeed.

The transformative project of the TPLF was aimed not so much at the administrative systems created by the Derg, which were in any case only weakly established in the province, as at what the Front perceived to be the fundamental causes of underdevelopment in the province:

The Tigrean people had lived a degrading economic and social life. Besides the exploitative and archaic feudal relations of production, the Amhara ruling classes executed policies that undermined the economic and social bases of the Tigreans (TPLF, 1985: 8).

These causes were tackled through various means, including, most importantly, land reform (see below). In addition, basic social services such as primary health care and education were introduced, as well as adult literacy campaigns aimed at both men and women. Agricultural and veterinary programmes aimed at improving crop and livestock production practices were provided, together with extension training for soil and water conservation and other measures designed to help peasants combat land degradation.

The oppression of women in traditional society was seen by the TPLF as a significant obstacle to socio-economic development and was addressed, amongst other ways, by means of granting women land and establishing their property rights in marriage and divorce. Women were also actively encouraged to participate in a new system of local self-government. Similarly, the rights of minority nationalities, religions, and artisan groups such as blacksmiths to hold land, and to equality under the law, were also established.

Aspects of "traditional culture" were also identified by the TPLF as contributing to underdevelopment. These included attitudes of deference and servitude that characterised patron-client relationships. Such attitudes were combated through public campaigns emphasizing the importance of self-reliance:

One of the most striking transformations in the liberated areas of Tigray is the change of attitude towards traditional culture. It is being replaced by a

revolutionary culture. In the past physical work and those who were engaged in it were despised and looked down on. Stories, proverbs and songs which glorify the feudal lords and downgrade the peasants, artisans, etc. were widespread. Now the situation has changed. Hard work is respected and those who are engaged in work which demands physical labour are encouraged (TPLF, 1985: 11).

Finally, the administration of political power in traditional society was identified by the TPLF (1985: 4) as a key area for reform:

A profound political change has been effected throughout the liberated areas of Tigray. In the past, political power was vested in the hands of the feudalists, bureaucrats and rich peasants. The poor and middle peasants and the workers who constituted the largest segment of the population were excluded from the political life of the society. They had no right to express their opinions freely and elect their leaders democratically.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to consider how each of the components of the TPLF's "people's democratic revolution" was implemented. The remainder of the chapter rather concentrates on two aspects in particular: land reform, and a new administrative, legislative, and judicial system centred around the formation of local people's councils, known initially as *baytos*.²⁶ Arguably, these two measures represented the most significant breaks with past institutional arrangements.

4.2 Land Reform²⁷

The TPLF considered land reform to be a crucial step in shattering the basis of traditional power in Ethiopia and freeing the productive resources of the province for economic growth (see TPLF, 1985). It was also seen as a key component in broader efforts to mobilise the peasantry for armed struggle. The formation of local land reform committees, comprised mainly of poor peasants, was the first step in the establishment of a more permanent structure of revolutionary governance.

²⁶ Local councils were called *baytos* during the war. At present, they are referred to as *mikre bet*.

²⁷ This section considers land reform with specific regard to peasant households and does not consider aspects of reform affecting commercial or state-sponsored agriculture or urban areas. For a discussion of these topics, see Bruce, Hoben and Rahmato (1993).

In the only existing account written by a TPLF cadre (in English), the rationale for land reform is spelled out in more detail:

Over the centuries a great deal of imbalance has developed in the size of holdings... By the time the revolution came 25% of the peasants had little or no land. Those who owned land had very small holdings: 45% had less than a hectare, 23% between half and one hectare and 21% between one and two hectares. A very small group of people, usually those in positions of power, and the church, owned a great deal of land. In addition... sections of the Tigrean people had no land rights. These included Moslems in certain *awrajas*, some women and immigrants... Land reform is necessary to redress this... and give land rights to those without them (Tekeste Agazi, 1983: 3-7).

In many respects, the TPLF had an advantage in introducing its own land reform after that of the Derg. Although the Derg's land reform was patchily implemented in Tigray, where it had taken place it was widely criticised. The 1975 proclamation establishing the reform did not provide detailed guidelines for how it was to be carried out.²⁸ As Halliday and Molyneux (1981: 107) note:

Beyond establishing an upper limit on tenancies, the decree had not specified in what form the new land would be distributed. The central government was unable to supervise the local distribution policies and it was those peasants who had been in a somewhat more privileged position prior to the reform who received the most land.

That the Derg's land reform did not prevent local notables from influencing redistribution is often cited by people in Enda Mariyam as a key reason why they did not support the programme. Significantly, it is the mode of implementation of the Derg's land reform, and especially the lack of coherent and enforceable guidelines, that attracted the most criticism, rather than the principles upon which the reform was based:

²⁸ The proclamation, Number 31, issued in March 1975, contained all of the main provisions for land reform, based on the notion of "land to the tiller". In a key study, Rahmato (1984: 37-38) outlines its main points: all land in Ethiopia would become 'the collective property of the Ethiopian people', private property, tenancy, wage-labour, transfer of land by sale, lease or mortgage would be prohibited, and the maximum area of land for each self-labouring rural household should not exceed 10 hectares. In *risti* areas, the proclamation stated that no non-residents would be entitled to make claims on land, a provision that effectively abolished *risti*. As Rahmato notes, subsequent proclamations after March 1975 contained additional legislation but did not effect any major alterations in the first proclamation.

If someone had good land, he might be able to keep it. The Derg cadre decided. It was not a correct distribution. Those who had friends or relatives that were cadre or party members, or who paid bribes, could get good land (Yohanis Elifeh, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

Given the problems inherent in the Derg's programme, the TPLF was able to distinguish itself as a movement highly responsive to local concerns by addressing those aspects of the Derg's land reform that attracted most criticism, and in particular the lack of local participation in decision-making.

4.2.1 Implementing the Reform

The first TPLF land reform was conducted in 1976 in Sobia *wereda* in Agame *awraja*, eastern Tigray (Chiari, 1996). From that time forward, the TPLF gradually expanded its land reform programme to other *weredas* throughout the province. Implementation within a single *wereda* was subject to revision and adjustment, so that some areas also had several rounds of redistribution (Young, 1995).

Despite local variations, the way reform proceeded in the initial stages can be summarised as follows (see Firebrace and Smith, 1982; Tekeste Agazi, 1983; Chiari, 1996). TPLF cadres would visit each *tabiya* in a *wereda* and conduct meetings to explain the goals of the reform programme. During these, peasants who indicated their support were identified and trained to act as local implementers. Under TPLF supervision, these peasants conducted a survey of landholdings in the *tabiya*, including a reckoning of the total amount and quality of arable land, and what percentages were held by the church, by the local nobility, and by "rich", "middle", and "poor" peasants.

After the study was complete, meetings were held in which delegates from each *tabiya* were elected to a drafting committee. This committee was responsible for producing guidelines for land redistribution, and for redrawing the boundaries of each *tabiya*. Delegates then presented these guidelines to their respective *tabiyas* for discussion and adoption. Once guidelines were adopted by *tabiya* residents, they served as the established land law. Land reform committees were then elected in each *kushet* within a *tabiya*, and the process of redistribution was begun.

As Teskete Agazi (1983) indicates, the early stages of the TPLF's land reform met with resistance from secular and ecclesiastical elites who stood to lose the most from a redistribution of holdings. The TPLF referred to these elites variously as "feudals", "the nobility", "traditional elites", "rich peasants", or even "anti-reform forces" (see Tekeste Agazi, 1983; TPLF, 1985).

With regard to secular elites, these terms probably refer to "big men" who may or may not have possessed titles, but who held significant amounts of *risti* land and received deferential behaviour from poor clients. With regard to ecclesiastical elites, the terms refer mainly to clergy members who enjoyed economic and social privileges by virtue of their control over land, including officials of *gwilti*-holding church and monasteries. However, as Young (1997: 185) observes, the land reform divided the clergy along economic lines: poor parish priests who were themselves peasant farmers tended to support redistribution.

Given that redistributions were carried out in areas under TPLF military control, resistance was indirect and took the form of "intrigue and sabotage" (Tekeste Agazi, 1983: 19). Big men attempted to bribe members of land reform committees, and threatened to stop providing grain loans to poorer followers if they supported land reform measures. According to Tekeste Agazi (1983: 23), senior clerics argued against the reform in theological terms:

They would say that since the land reform was going against the wishes of God and the church, there would be no rain in the growing season and everyone would starve. They would even point to their hands and say, "The fingers on our hands are not all of equal size because God wanted them to be unequal. Likewise, the inequality of man is God-ordained. It is evil to try to change the will of God and forcibly impose equality. Lo and behold, those of you who are actively participating in this evil reform".

Significantly, the TPLF's skill in isolating individuals who sought to derail land reform, and its insistence on strict adherence to the newly-established land law, went far toward convincing peasants that the TPLF was a strong and competent administrator. As one informant noted:

Under the Derg, there were some people who didn't agree with the distribution. They ploughed the land they had before by force. But it was strong under TPLF, and no one could do this (Mebratu Kidan, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

In terms of the actual content of the reform,²⁹ all land was declared national property, and its sale or mortgage was prohibited. Those formerly excluded from holding land became eligible to receive land in their area of residence. Land formerly held by churches and monasteries was broken up and added to the total amount of land in each *kushet* for redistribution. Individual clergy members then received shares of land in the same manner as lay peasants. In addition, all taxes on land were abolished for the duration of the war.³⁰

In each *kushet*, arable land was divided in two ways. First, land was divided into plots close to homesteads, and those farther away, the aim being to ensure that farmers received some portion of their total holding in close proximity to their homesteads, with outlying plots to be distributed by lottery. Second, all arable land was divided according to quality, comprising "rich", "middle", and "poor". The aim of this was to ensure all farmers received a mixture of each type of land or, failing that, a commensurate increase in size of plots of lesser quality. According to informants in Enda Mariyam, the categorisation of land in this way was an important distinction between the TPLF and the Derg. As a member of the first land reform committee explained:

Under the TPLF, the land was divided into rich and poor, and they arranged it so that these would be mixed. After that, they counted all the people who had to get land, and it was distributed in this way. We also had reserve land, and during June we gave it to the people who didn't get good land. We gave the people land near to their house, but if the land near their house is poor, we gave additional land. But under the Derg, there was no measurement like this. It was not a correct distribution (Haleka Michael Itai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

²⁹ This description is derived from Firebrace and Smith (1982), Tekeste Agazi (1983), and interviews with village informants in Enda Mariyam and political cadres in Hagre Selam.

³⁰ In 1993, a land tax was re-introduced for the first time since the end of the war.

The redistribution of plots was based on a "*gibri*", meaning "a share". Each adult received a half *gibri* of land; married couples received a full *gibri*. Additional quarter *gibri* shares were provided for every two additional children in a household. This basic plan of land distribution remains in force today.

In terms of area of landholding, there is no precise measure for a *gibri*, since the exact size of an individual share depends on various factors. The unit of land measurement most common in Dega Tembien is a *tsimdi*, defined as the area of land that can be ploughed by a team of oxen in a single day.³¹ In Enda Mariyam, a *tsimdi* is approximately 1,700 square meters; according to a village-based survey, the average household of 4.3 persons holds around 0.8 hectares of land.³²

Under TPLF auspices, local land reform committees were responsible for minor adjustments in landholdings. For example, in cases where someone died without children, or where an individual left a *kushet* to reside elsewhere, their landholding could be redistributed to someone else waiting for land on a first-come, first-served basis. Major redistributions, however, had to await a formal announcement from the TPLF. Since little land became available to local committees for individual redistributions, many children who reached adulthood after the initial round of land reform in the late 1970s and early 1980s had to wait some years before obtaining an adult share of land.

4.2.2 The Derg and the TPLF Land Reforms Compared

Although broadly similar in their political objectives, the content of the TPLF and Derg land reforms differed in important ways. One of the chief differences was who, exactly, received land. Under the Derg, land was distributed to heads of households resident within the jurisdictional area of a Peasant Association, according to the number of mouths that needed to be fed; in practice, this meant that rights in land were held by households rather than by individuals (Rahmato, 1984: 49).

³¹ The word *tsimdi* is also used to refer to the team of oxen itself.

³² See Appendix 4 for calculation of local land measures, and Appendix 8 for survey findings.

In contrast, under the TPLF rights in land were held by individuals. Every person, either male or female, was eligible to receive land upon reaching adulthood, with minimum ages stipulated by law. As will be seen in Chapter 5, this aspect of the TPLF land reform was to have profound implications for the status of women within marriage, for marriage and divorce practices, and for the process by which young persons separate from their parental households. Here, it is important to note that under the TPLF, women were eligible to receive land regardless of their marital status.

Another key difference between the TPLF and the Derg land reforms concerns the issue of tenancy. While the Derg explicitly outlawed tenancy, the TPLF did not (Chiari, 1996). In the early literature on the TPLF reform, there are references to tenancy being outlawed (see Firebrace and Smith, 1982; Tekeste Agazi 1983). It appears, however, that this early position that was never actually implemented, or was implemented in select areas but gradually phased out. Although the TPLF land reform did not outlaw tenancy, tenancy contracts were nevertheless to be registered with *tabiya baytos* (people's committees). However, informants in Enda Mariyam say this was loosely enforced; most people continued to arrange rental contracts in private.

Tenancy is a central feature of the local agricultural economy in Tigray and will be discussed in the next chapter. Here, it is important to note that, considering tenancy is associated with wealth stratification, the TPLF showed pragmatism in allowing it to continue under the new tenure system. However, even were the TPLF to have outlawed tenancy, it is unlikely this would have succeeded in eradicating the practice altogether. As Ege (1994) notes, tenancy did not completely disappear in areas governed by the Derg but was rather driven underground and conducted in secret.

Similarly, whereas the Derg explicitly outlawed the hiring of labour, the TPLF did not. According to Young (1995: 165-166), the outlawing of wage-labour under the Derg's land reform had both economic and political implications:

A critical element of the Derg's land reform was the prohibition on hiring of labour, a provision that made sense in southern Ethiopia, but which was bitterly resented in Tigray. Meles Zenawi³³ said, "There was no part of Ethiopia

³³ Prime Minister of Ethiopia, and former chairperson of the TPLF.

where money earned in this way was more important to the people. The Derg was stupid to forbid this, for it forced our people into poverty and hopelessness and it gave our movement important support".

Finally, in terms of the process of distribution itself, under the Derg land redistributions were carried out at the administrative level of the Peasant Association, comprising a number of villages and commensurate with the *tabiya*. Under the TPLF, redistributions were implemented at *kushet* level and overseen by a land reform committee made up of *kushet* residents. Chiari (1996) suggests this allowed for more effective public control.

4.2.3 Land Tenure in the Transitional Period

Broadly speaking, two rounds of land redistribution under the TPLF can be identified in the period 1976 to 1992, when a modification in the tenure system was introduced. The first covers the period 1976 to 1987. During this time, land in individual *weredas* was redistributed for the first time under the TPLF. The second, from 1987 to 1992, was aimed at accommodating new claimants who had reached adulthood after the first redistribution was completed (Chiari, 1996). It was also intended to promote environmental rehabilitation and the livestock sector, by setting aside some land in each *tabiya* for afforestation and grazing (Hammond, 1989). Some minor provisions were also added to the land law. These included the fact that a person must be resident within a *tabiya* for six months before receiving land, and the right of disabled persons, demobilized soldiers, and those who were in prison during previous distributions to receive land.

Every village had, however, its own distinct time-frame for land reform, depending largely on the ebb and flow of the military situation. In Enda Mariyam, after an initial redistribution under the Derg in 1976, the first TPLF-sponsored distribution occurred in 1979, followed a year later by a second distribution. According to one informant, this was because "The first distribution was seen by TPLF, and they concluded that it was not equal. It had some mistakes, so they did it again". The next round of redistribution occurred after a ten-year interval, in 1990.

In general, the land law established during the initial round of reform, with minor modification during the second round, remained intact until 1992. In that year, the regional government of Tigray announced two important changes: first, that land could now be passed from one generation to the next through inheritance, and second, that there would be no further redistributions for at least a decade (Pitt, 1992). According to the regional Minister of Agriculture, these changes were deemed necessary to increase tenure security and encourage peasants to make improvements in their existing holdings (Berhane Hailu, 1992). In 1993, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia announced a similar policy for the country as a whole. Inheritance would be permitted, but major redistributions would be suspended until the end of the transitional period (Bruce, Hoben and Rahmato, 1993).

4.3 Rural Administration

Land reform and the creation of a new system of rural administration were closely related processes. As noted above, under the auspices of the TPLF, land reform promoted a shift of local administrative authority onto committees comprised mainly of peasants at the poorer end of the wealth spectrum, who expressed enthusiasm for reform. At the same time, the political power of "big men" was undermined by land redistributions that often greatly diminished their holdings. In Enda Mariyam, for example, one of the most powerful men in the village - the *chika shum*, or headman - held approximately 12 hectares just prior to 1974. After the second round of TPLF land reform in 1980, his holding was reduced to 6 *tsimdi*, or 1.5 hectares.

In this regard, land reform was the first step in establishing a new system of rural administration weighted toward the majority of poorer peasants. Young (1997: 195) suggests that this administration may prove to be the most enduring accomplishment of the TPLF. Its basis was a popularly elected "people's council", known as a *bayto*. As Barnabas and Zwi (1997: 42) note, *baytos* were the key institutions of political participation and accountability established by the TPLF; they were also key implementing bodies for the programmes of the revolution.

4.3.1 The *Bayto* System

The first *bayto* was established in the town of Sheraro in western Tigray in 1980 (Firebrace and Smith, 1982). By 1985, there were well-established *baytos* in almost all areas under TPLF control (Smith, 1983).

Firebrace and Smith (1982) provide a useful description of how *baytos* were organised. The first step in the process was led by TPLF cadres, who organised peasants at *tabiya* level into mass associations representing the interests of distinct groups, including women, farmers, and youth. From each of these mass associations, individuals were then elected to serve as representatives on *baytos* at *wereda* level. For every *wereda*, approximately 100 people would be elected to a *bayto* representing a constituency of between 30,000 and 40,000 people (Barnabas and Zwi, 1997). Elections to the *bayto* were held yearly, although an individual member could be removed by a majority vote sooner if they failed to fulfill their duties (Smith, 1983).

The seriousness with which the TPLF devolved administrative authority to district level through the *baytos* is often cited as an important factor in gaining peasant support for the revolution (see Hammond, 1989; Wright, 1983). During the war, the *baytos* were effectively responsible for the administration of *weredas* under TPLF control. This included, amongst other things, overseeing the introduction of new laws, implementation of additional land redistributions, co-ordination of public works construction such as schools and clinics, and organisation of local aspects of famine relief and rehabilitation programmes (Firebrace and Smith, 1982).

Since the end of the war and the establishment of civilian government, there has been some modification in the *bayto* system, although its basic features remain the same. *Baytos* - or, their more recent name, *mikre bet* - now exist at *tabiya* level. *Tabiya mikre bets* constitute the lowest formal level of government administration in Tigray. Tigray as a whole is governed by elected representatives to a state *mikre bet*, headed by a state executive council.

In Enda Mariyam, the *tabiya mikre bet* presently comprises 36 elected representatives and is led by an executive committee known as the *fetsamit*, comprising seven people including a chairperson. Within the *mikre bet* there are three main committees: administrative, economic, and social. During the war, the administrative committee included a judicial affairs sub-committee that functioned as a local court. Informants in Enda Mariyam insist, however, that the present-day judicial committee - known as the *ferdi bayto* - is a separate body of three persons directly elected by *tabiya* residents.

Mass associations still constitute an important mechanism for local mobilisation. In Enda Mariyam, women's and farmer's associations are the main vehicle through which development projects introduced by district-level departments are implemented. Mass associations are also the only aspect of administration that reaches down to *kushet* (village) level, although they have no formal authority at this level, being under the overall authority of the *tabiya mikre bet*.

4.3.2 Reforming the *Serit*

One of the first tasks of the rural administration established under the TPLF was to oversee the adoption of new laws introduced by TPLF cadres in each district. According to informants in Enda Mariyam, customary rules governing village life during the imperial period were passed down orally from one generation to the next. These rules were referred to collectively as *serit* and were distinct from *hige*, or written civil and penal codes enacted by the imperial government and enforced through district and higher-level courts. *Serit* are also distinct from habitual practices that are not rule-governed and which are instead referred to as *bahli*, which can be roughly translated as "culture" (see Bruce, 1976: 488).

The *serit* dealt with many aspects of village social life, including procedures for the transfer of property upon marriage, divorce, and inheritance, and procedures for the mediation of land and other forms of local dispute. As one informant noted, the *serit* comprised:

The things our fathers did, and what their fathers did before them. It is the law that was handed to us by our fathers.

Knowledge of these laws was the particular realm of *shumagele*, or elders, who were called upon to settle disputes and provide mediation. Typically, older men of widely perceived wisdom and sense would act as *shumagele*, although younger men might also serve as *shumagele* if their mediation skills were widely acknowledged (see Bauer, 1973).

With the arrival of the TPLF, the rules governing village life were formalised in writing for the first time. This was done primarily through the work of TPLF political cadres, who introduced a standard set of laws to each *tabiya* and facilitated the discussion, modification, and eventual adoption of these laws, typically through the vehicle of the mass associations (see TPLF, 1985: 4).

Not all aspects of village life were written down, however. For example, procedures for repayment of oxen loans are not part of the written *serit*. On the other hand, procedures for the division of property upon divorce were explicitly outlined in the new *serit*. Indeed, it is instructive to study a *serit* adopted under the TPLF's auspices because it points to those aspects of traditional society that were targets of reform efforts.³⁴

Enforcing the rules contained in the new *serit* was the responsibility of newly formed justice committees, or *ferdi baytos*. *Ferdi baytos* were also responsible for forming local courts to hear cases coming under *tabiya*-level jurisdiction. According to Young (1997: 189), these courts were of particular importance in bolstering the legitimacy of local administration, because they were both accessible and locally accountable. After the war, the *serit* was further modified, in tandem with the introduction of new civil and penal codes and the revision of the court system at *wereda* level throughout the state. Although a new judicial system has been introduced, at village level *shumagele* (elders) still continue to play an important role in witnessing transactions and brokering disputes that fall outside the formal realm of court jurisdiction.

³⁴ See Appendix 7 for a translation of the *serit* of Enda Mariyam.

5. Post-War Developments

At the time fieldwork was begun in Enda Mariyam in February 1993, the war in Ethiopia had been over for approximately one and a half years, and a TPLF-led political coalition was leading a transitional government in Addis Ababa. In Tigray, regional elections in June 1992 had seen an overwhelming victory for political leaders drawn almost exclusively from the TPLF. In effect, the personalities in government in Tigray changed little since the war. The transition from liberation front to civilian governing party was not without problems, however, especially in terms of establishing working relationships with ministerial departments in Addis Ababa that did not share the TPLF's political experience or revolutionary aims. Nevertheless, the state government of Tigray was, at the time of fieldwork, considered by many observers to be the most cohesive and effective in Ethiopia.

During the course of fieldwork, a number of milestones in Ethiopia's political history were passed, the most notable being the election in 1994 of a Constituent Assembly that ratified a federal constitution in December of that year. This assembly was elected by delegates who were themselves selected at regional level. The process of electing the Constituent Assembly was not a remote event, far from the lives of rural people. On the contrary, virtually everyone in Enda Mariyam came out to vote, including elderly monks who had not left the monastery for many years.

In addition to these broader political developments, more local developments were also taking place. The regional government pressed ahead with an ambitious construction project that saw an all-weather road completed from Makele south to the town of Abi Adi. This road brought vehicle transport, including public buses, within a stone's throw of the village of Enda Mariyam for the first time. A grinding mill was also constructed in Enda Mariyam as part of a rural development initiative of the Relief Society of Tigray. Other development initiatives, such as dam building, were also proliferating in the district.

Alongside these post-war developments, reforms introduced during the war were still in place. The *baytos* were still functioning, although they had devolved to *tabiya* level,

and the land tenure system was still operating in basically the same form. Hence, in terms of the organisation of rural social life, the most significant reform measures had already taken place by the time the war was over. It is the implications of these measures for social life in the present day that are considered in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3 - OXEN, LAND AND WEALTH

1. Introduction

This chapter lays the groundwork for considering the impact of revolutionary reform on the local farm economy. In the next chapter, I examine how land reform in particular precipitated changes in the dynamics of the local political economy, including the character of wealth differentiation and the nature of social stratification.

The discussion begins in this chapter, however, with a description of the local farm economy. Describing the main features of the farm economy is important not only in terms of understanding the impact of land reform but also because there have been very few ethnographic accounts of local economic practice since Bauer completed his fieldwork in the late 1960s.³⁵ Indeed, in the absence of reliable qualitative and especially quantitative data, much initial fieldwork in Enda Mariyam was occupied with obtaining a basic understanding of rural livelihoods.

Throughout the chapter, reference is made to the results of a household survey conducted among 128 out of 228 households in the village. This survey elicited basic information on household assets and economic practices.³⁶

The chapter begins with an overview of agricultural production in Enda Mariyam. After a description of household-based farming practices, the chapter briefly considers some of the ways households cope with deficits in crop production. In so doing, key features of the farm economy are highlighted, such as the gender division of labour, aspects of domestic management, and the differential advantages of richer versus poorer households.

Following this, the chapter moves on to examine the distribution of oxen in the village, and the nature of wealth differentiation, in more detail. As McCann (1995) argues, the

³⁵ Bauer's study (1973) itself does not provide more than a summary overview of local economic practices, mainly because it concentrates on the issue of political competition.

³⁶ See Appendix 1, Section 4.4 for survey methodology, and Appendix 8 for findings.

distribution of farm capital in the form of oxen is intimately bound up with patterns of social stratification in the ox-plough farming system. The chapter considers the relationship between oxen ownership, access to land for cultivation, and household wealth. This includes a description of the various means by which farmers obtain oxen from other farmers and what they must provide in return.

2. Farming Practices in Enda Mariyam

2.1 Land and Crops

Rainfed cropping is the most important economic activity in Enda Mariyam. Most households derive the majority of their income from crop production. Although a limited market for unskilled daily labour has developed in the towns since the end of the war, crop production is still the primary source of income for most households.

Farming is a household undertaking. Men, women and children of both sexes participate in the production process. Typically, a husband and wife and one child above the age of seven or eight years can manage the tasks associated with agriculture. Farm labour is highly gendered, however, with some activities such as ploughing and sowing belonging to the male sphere and others, such as seed preparation, belonging to the female sphere. There are also mixed-gender tasks.

The land each household farms typically comprises a minimum of three or four plots, and frequently more.³⁷ These plots are usually scattered throughout the village, both near and far from the homestead, and comprise a mixture of different soil types and conditions. According to measurements made during fieldwork, the average holding per household in Enda Mariyam is 0.8 hectares. However, as will be seen below, the area of land a household holds is not necessarily commensurate with the area it actually cultivates.

³⁷ Six households in Endabazbanom *got* of Enda Mariyam were chosen for detailed follow-up over the course of an agricultural year. (See Appendix 1, Section 4.5). The average number of plots for these households is 7.7, ranging from 3 to 12 plots. In general, it is extremely difficult to obtain an accurate account of how many plots a farmer has by simply asking.

Enda Mariyam is known in the *wereda* as a good area for crops, mainly due to the superior quality of its soil. *Walka*, or clay soil, comprises more than half the arable land of the village. This can be compared to Tegula village where *hufsa*, or sandy soil, predominates. According to Tegula farmers, even when there is poor rainfall, people in Enda Mariyam achieve reasonable yields as a consequence of their soil.

Households plant a variety of different kinds of crops on the plots that comprise their holdings. Typically, three-quarters of the land cultivated will be for cereal crops, with the remaining one-quarter devoted to pulses. The main cereal crops include: *taf* (*Eragrostis abyssinica*), an indigenous Ethiopian grain of high market value; *kerkata*, a mixture of wheat and barley;³⁸ and different varieties of barley and wheat, the most common being *sahsa* and *ashmolemalo*, respectively. The main pulse crops are: *alkway* (horse beans), *borshin* (lentils), *engwaya* (vetch), and *ater* (peas). These varieties together are used to prepare virtually all of the food consumed by the household. Meat and poultry are typically eaten only on special occasions.

2.2 Agricultural Seasons and Activities

Farmers in Enda Mariyam distinguish three main seasons, associated with different climatic conditions and different phases of the agricultural cycle. Because rainfall occurs within a relatively narrow time-frame, farmers have little flexibility. Certain farm tasks must be completed within a specified period in order to take advantage of rainfall, or crop yields will be reduced. The lack of flexibility in the agricultural calendar confers a great advantage on those households that already possess the necessary capital, and especially oxen, to farm independently.

The season of *hagay* extends from February to the end of May and covers the time of the *azmera* or small rains.³⁹ In southern Tigray, farmers enjoy two growing seasons as a result of the *azmera* rains, but this is not the case in Enda Mariyam. *Azmera* rains are also important for the growth of rangeland grasses; poor or non-existent

³⁸ Also known as *hamfes*.

³⁹ Also called *belg* rains.

azmera rains take an immediate toll on cattle health. During the first year of fieldwork, for example, *azmera* rains were delayed until mid-April, and cattle became very weak.

Ploughing is the most important activity during *hagay* and represents the start of a new cycle of annual crop production. In Enda Mariyam, ploughing is exclusively a male activity. Usually adult men plough, although boys may also plough if they have the strength and skill. During the early years of the war, the TPLF initiated a project that taught women to plough as a means of promoting their economic autonomy (Hammond, 1989). This project was abandoned, however, when women complained that ploughing constituted an additional labour burden. When asked about the possibility of women ploughing, both male and female informants in Enda Mariyam insisted that women lacked the physical strength to plough. As will be seen, the fact that women do not plough means that female-headed households find it difficult to farm independently.

Farmers in Enda Mariyam note that, all other things being equal, ploughing is the single most important determinant of crop yields. In theory, there should be four ploughing periods per year. For each plot, there are specific factors that come into the picture to influence the optimum ploughing schedule. These include soil type, location, and what has been planted on the same plot in the previous year. In general, however, farmers in Enda Mariyam say that four ploughing periods a year is an optimum schedule. These are named as follows: *nhela* (early January to end February), *terwa* (March and April), *teselas* (May), and *zere* (prior to sowing in June, July, August).

In practice, however, only farmers with ready access to oxen are able to plough each of their plots this number of times. Farmers who lack ready access to oxen are almost always forced to reduce the number of times they plough. For some crop varieties, such as *alkway* (horse beans), this does not necessarily carry penalties. For cereal crops, however, a reduction in the number of ploughings has a direct effect on yields. Faced with limited access to oxen, many farmers prioritise ploughing on the best quality plots of land.

Krempti, from June to the end of September, brings the main *krempti* rains, which begin anytime from late May forward and usually taper off by mid-September. *Krempti*

is the single season for planting crops in the village, and includes the time of weeding. *Krempti* rains are short, intensive downpours. In Enda Mariyam, violent hailstorms during the *krempti* season are not uncommon.

Planting is a male activity in Enda Mariyam. Seeds are broadcast by the eldest man in the household, who may have been brought to the field from the homestead specifically for this purpose. A single man can do the job of ploughing and sowing, although the work is made easier with a second man or boy to drive the oxen. Where a household has a shortage of male labour and is pressed for time, a woman may drive oxen, but sowing will always be done by men. Preparation of seed, on the other hand, is a female activity and derives from the fact that women normally control the household granary (see below).

The third season, *kewhe*, runs from October to the end of February. It is unusual for much rain to fall during *kewhe*, although there may be isolated showers in October and November; December to the end of February is almost always dry, however. Agricultural activities in *kewhe* include cutting and threshing. Cutting is said to be a male activity, although both women and adolescent girls were observed cutting during fieldwork. For some households, food supplies are so low by the time crops are cut that some portion of the harvest is threshed immediately by hand. The amount of hand-threshed grain obtained by a household is not insignificant, relative to the total amount produced by the household each year.⁴⁰

Most crops are threshed using oxen on a threshing floor called an *ahwdi*. According to informants, an *ahwdi* is "like a church", meaning a place where a solemn countenance is required. Informants also say that women are not allowed inside the *ahwdi* circle, but in practice women do go inside the *ahwdi* to assist in driving the oxen and throwing stalks onto the threshing floor. Winnowing, however, is done by men. Threshing is usually completed by the end of December.

Cross-cutting the three seasons of *hagay*, *krempti*, and *kewhe* is the religious calendar of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In Enda Mariyam, as in most villages

⁴⁰ Yield measurements for six case-study households (1994) indicated that hand threshing accounted for between 5% and 14% of total harvest.

throughout Tigray, this calendar regulates the rhythms of everyday life. It determines, for example, what types of food may or may not be eaten at different times of the year, as well as when ploughing and other forms of labour may take place. The religious calendar also breaks the year into smaller time periods against which the progression of farm activities and the quality of rainfall can be measured. When asked about rainfall, people in Enda Mariyam often responded by comparing actual conditions to the general knowledge of what the local climate should be around the time of a particular saint's day. In this way, farmers know the exact pattern of their microclimate and are alert to small changes.

2.3 Livestock and Fodder

In addition to crops, harvesting of straw is a crucial component of the local farm economy. In Enda Mariyam, straw is the main source of food for livestock and especially cattle. Aside from poultry, livestock in Enda Mariyam include cattle, sheep, goats, and donkeys.

Sheep and goats are generally owned by households who can afford to invest in other livestock in addition to oxen. Aside from a source of meat on special occasions, sheep and goats provide an important buffer against periods of crop failure, since they can be sold to purchase food in the marketplace. Having sheep and goats thus enables a household to protect its most important asset - oxen - against the necessity of sale in bad years. Only one in six households surveyed in Enda Mariyam could afford to keep small stock, however. For most households, the priority in terms of livestock investment goes to cattle, and especially oxen. The importance of oxen relative to other livestock is neatly summed up by one farmer:

The ox is our feeder. Without him, we cannot plough or thresh. So, we think of our oxen first, and second about our donkeys, and then about our cows. Only then can we think about sheep and goats (Mebratu Kidan, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

Households that own livestock deploy their limited resources toward investment in cattle, and especially oxen. For example, out of the 76% of surveyed households that owned livestock in Enda Mariyam in 1993 (excluding poultry), approximately half

owned cattle but no other kind of animals; of these, approximately half owned oxen but no other type of cattle.

A central problem for cattle-owning households is how to feed their animals throughout the year. Cattle are grazed in the *hazati*, or communal pastureland of the *tabiya*, but this area is relatively small, and grass is only available during wet season months. In Enda Mariyam, it is straw from crop production that forms the majority of cattle food, and cattle-owning households expend considerable effort each year to obtain enough straw to maintain their animals.

Harvesting of straw occurs directly after threshing, when stalks are gathered together into bundles called *tsor*. Wheat, barley, and *kerkata* straw form the staple fodder diet and are typically stored together. *Taf* straw is stored separately as far as possible; it has a higher nutritional content and is used exclusively for oxen. In addition to straw, cattle are also fed on grass cut from late September to mid-October. Grass is cut from around the homestead and from the communal pastureland.

Given their reliance on straw, cattle are directly affected when crop production falters. If yields are especially low, there may be cattle deaths. Since oxen are crucial to cultivation, a decline in cattle health has a feedback effect on crop production in the next growing season, which in turn affects straw production. Hence, the vulnerability of the agricultural and livestock sectors tend to compound each other.

3. Coping with Deficits

Crop production is vulnerable to a variety of factors. Variability of rainfall, virulence of weed growth, and regular infestations of insect and rodent pests can all severely damage a potentially good harvest. During the first year of fieldwork, a rat infestation led to an estimated 25% reduction in the harvest. During the second year of fieldwork, rains were extremely heavy and caused waterlogging, and the horse bean crop was badly affected by a fungal disease. Such events are not untypical.

Farming practices also operate at a relatively low technical level. Although the Ministry of Agriculture has an ambitious programme for increasing crop production through the introduction of improved farming techniques, improved seed varieties, and the use of chemical fertiliser, Enda Mariyam farmers were not much interested in these programmes, with a few exceptions.⁴¹ The apparent conservatism of Enda Mariyam farmers is in part linked to the enormous opportunity costs associated with the failure of crop production in a single season, and with the very small amount of cash or surplus income of any kind available to households.

Due to these and other factors, households are rarely able to obtain enough income from crop production alone to meet their annual requirements. Most households in Enda Mariyam produce only enough grain for eight to nine months' supply. The situation is even worse in the village of Tegula, where most households produce only enough grain for four to five months' supply. Hence, households are almost always faced with the need to make up for deficits in grain production through a variety of different strategies.

3.1 Managing Household Grain Supply

In the typical Tigray household, the woman is responsible for managing the household's grain consumption and for preparing food. Just as women do not normally plough, men do not prepare food. The fact that women manage grain consumption and prepare food means that their role is central to the success of the household enterprise. A good manager will ensure that grain supply is stretched as far as possible; a poor manager will waste grain and move the household closer to economic collapse and dispersal.

⁴¹ In 1993, chemical fertiliser cost 143 Ethiopian *birr* per quintal, a price out of the reach of most farmers in Enda Mariyam. Attitudes toward chemical fertiliser varied: many people claimed it promotes weed growth. Of those farmers who did use fertiliser, most applied a mixture of manure and ash on plots close to the homestead. Most manure, however, is collected from fields by young children and dried in the household compound for use in cooking. I found only a handful of farmers who deliberately collected manure for use as fertiliser.

The household granary is typically hidden from public view. During religious holidays, local priests who come to bless the household enter the granary first. Normally, no one may enter the granary unless invited by the woman of the house, including other household members, and no one may remove grain from the *sherfa*, or storage baskets, unless given permission. Indeed, repeated violations of this norm of behaviour by a husband is potential grounds for divorce.

A key informant, Medin Wolde Selassie, who manages a large household, noted that she begins making calculations concerning grain supply almost immediately after the harvest. First, she estimates together with her husband roughly how much grain will be needed as seed and subtracts this amount from the total. After seed has been deducted, Medin compares what is left against what she knows are the consumption requirements of her household.

In addition to seed and food, there are other claims on household grain supply. Foremost among these is grain used for religious practice, including gifts to the local church on saints' days. The household may also have debts to repay or may need cash from the sale of grain to purchase of clothing or livestock. These considerations enter the calculation of what is required versus what has been obtained from crop production. With few exceptions, households face some amount of annual deficit, with the exact amount varying from year to year. Depending on the size of the deficit, households use various strategies to fill income gaps. The most common are described below.

3.2 Reducing Consumption

A common step taken to stretch grain reserves is to reduce food consumption. If there is a poor yield, a good manager will begin almost immediately to reduce the quantity, and change the quality, of food she prepares. As Medin noted after the 1994 harvest:

I have to begin now to save our grain, because we have so little this year. Even we may not have enough for seed. If I don't start now, we will finish our grain quickly (Medin Wolde Selassie, farmer's wife, Enda Mariyam).

Reduced consumption means fewer pieces of *enjera*, the staple fermented bread, at each meal. It also means downgrading the quality of grains used to prepare *enjera* dough. The amount of *taf*, for example, will usually be reduced or eliminated altogether, while the proportion of barley and/or sorghum will be increased. The same alterations apply to sauces that go with *enjera*: the amount of butter or oil added will be reduced or eliminated. Preparation of coffee and *sewa* (beer) will be minimised, and salt will be substituted for sugar.

Reduced food consumption is facilitated when male household members leave the village for short periods of time, for example to earn income as unskilled labourers in towns. Women tend to downgrade the quality of food they prepare when men are absent. As Medin explained:

If your husband is here, you bring a lot of *enjera* and you prepare *tsubhi* (sauce). But if he's away, you eat a small amount of *enjera* and you don't make *tsubhi*. You just put *berbere* (red pepper) and salt. Children eat well when their father is at home, because we make good food. I never prepare chicken if my husband is away. It would be a shame if I ate chicken ahead of my husband. I only make *sewa* if my husband is here. If he's away, we may not even eat; for ourselves we are careless.

As well as reducing food consumption, households can also reduce the amount of grain used in Ethiopian Orthodox religious practice. One of these practices is the monthly preparation of *sewa* (beer) and food in honour of the household's patron saint. Normally, guests are invited to the household to eat and drink during this ceremony, known as a *mezeker*. If the household is short of grain, however, the amount of *sewa* and food prepared, and the number of invited guests, can be minimised.

In addition, gifts to the local church can be reduced. The annual total of these gifts is not insubstantial, especially compared to the total income of the average household. Records for three case-study households in Enda Mariyam indicate that expenditure of grain for religious purposes, including gifts, comprised 8% to 13% of total crop yield in the 1994/95 season. Gifts to the church include voluntary tokens provided on the days of saints that have personal importance to household members, and standardised gifts that constitute fixed annual payments. On the annual day of the

patron saint of Enda Mariyam, for example, every household is expected to provide a *mewah* (gift) in the form of a fixed amount of grain and food. *Mewah* are also expected for weddings, christening, and funerals, and on other important holy days in the annual calendar.

Interestingly, the size of the *mewah* changes year-to-year, depending on the quality of the previous year's harvest. In Enda Mariyam in 1993, for example, local priests together with the assembled parish of the Mariyam church, decided to cut the *mewah* to three *enjera*, one *hambasha* (bread made from wheat), and three *menelik* of grain (approximately 1.8 kilograms) per household. The previous year, the size of the *mewah* was exactly double this amount.

Informants say that, faced with severe grain shortages, they would abandon all gifts to the church with the permission of church leaders, but would still do everything possible to perform the monthly *mezeker*. The importance of maintaining the goodwill of the household's patron saint is considered in Chapter 6. Here, it is important to note that only when there is outright famine, say villagers, will the *mezeker* be abandoned.

Finally, household consumption requirements can be reduced by decreasing the number of consumers in the household. Typically, this means sending away one or several members to live temporarily in other households, or to work in the towns. The extent to which households adjust their numbers in this way depends, however, on the amount of labour available; normally, a household will not send away members who are an essential part of the labour force.

In this regard, there are gender differences. While male labour is critical during certain periods in the agricultural cycle, such as ploughing and planting, it is less necessary at other times of the year. Consequently, men can be spared to leave the village during dry season months, to seek work in the towns.

Unlike male labour, female labour is needed year-round to prepare food and carry out other domestic tasks on a regular basis. A single able-bodied woman, ideally with the help of an adolescent girl, can manage this work. Hence, if grain shortages are severe, and if there are additional girls in the household, they can be sent to live with

relatives, or to work in the towns. The same holds true for boys not yet strong enough to fully participate in agricultural production. Typically, one young boy is enough to look after the household's livestock; additional boys can then be spared to live outside the household.

3.3 Loans

Approximately 72% of surveyed households in Enda Mariyam cited borrowing as their primary strategy for making up deficits in crop production. For the year 1992/93, approximately one-third of surveyed households said they borrowed either grain or cash. These loans do not include small amounts of grain or food regularly exchanged between women of different households on a reciprocal basis.

When asked, informants say they usually prefer to borrow grain, because it can be repaid in kind, whereas cash must be obtained in the marketplace through the sale of grain. Since most debts are collected directly after the harvest, this means a household would be forced to sell grain at a time when its market value is lowest.

In Enda Mariyam, the vast majority of loans are transacted between people living in the village; loans may also be obtained from a creditor resident outside the village, although this is rare. Loan agreements are usually verbal. In some cases, a *wahas* or guarantor is called in to witness the agreement, particularly when the amounts involved are relatively large. Failure to repay a large loan is a serious matter; it can, for example, be brought before the *tabiya ferdi bayto*, assuming there is a *wahas* who can provide testimony.

With the arrival of TPLF administration in Enda Mariyam, interest payments on loans of both cash and grain were formally outlawed. However, voluntary forms of interest payment still remain. One of these is the upgrading of the quality of the grain that was borrowed. So, for example, a person who borrows barley may return the same amount of wheat, and one who borrows wheat may return the same amount of *taf*. Another form of hidden interest is the provision of a day's labour to a creditor, in addition to repayment. Both these practices help increase the chances of obtaining another loan from the same creditor.

Household heads say that, whenever possible, they prefer to borrow from close kin and friends. This is borne out by survey results that indicate that out of those households that obtained a grain or cash loan in 1992/93, approximately half borrowed from their *haw* (close kin). A key reason for this is that terms of repayment will usually be more flexible; for example, it may be possible to stretch payment out over a longer period of time, or to repay only with labour.

However, although close kin and friends are normally obligated to provide each other with assistance, not all are in a position to provide substantial loans. In cases where more than a *gebeta*⁴² of grain is need, it is usually necessary to seek out a grain-rich creditor. Grain "rich" households do not usually store grain for more than one year. This is because old grain cannot easily be sold in the marketplace for a competitive price. Hence, households that have a surplus prefer to loan out grain and receive "new" grain as repayment just after harvest. This also reduces storage losses.

In Enda Mariyam, monks often act as creditors. According to informants, monks are grain "rich" because they earn income from the land, but have no dependants to feed. In many instances, monks act as grain creditors to farmers who plough their land for them.

The heavy reliance of Enda Mariyam residents on loans of grain to fill deficits can be compared with the residents of Tegula village. Because Enda Mariam is relatively fertile, there is more grain in circulation in the village and hence more potential creditors to borrow from. At the same time, the number of potential creditors typically expands after a good harvest and contracts after a bad harvest. In 1994, for example, opportunities for loans in Enda Mariyam contracted following a poor harvest, and many people who would otherwise have borrowed grain had to purchase it in the market.

In Tegula, there is less grain produced, due to poor soils and a dry climate. As a result, Tegula people find it more difficult to borrow from others in the village, because the number of potential creditors is smaller. As one Tegula resident observed:

⁴² A large woven basket used for storing, transporting and measuring grain, holding approximately 19 kilograms (see Appendix 4).

In Enda Mariam, they are rich in grain. They can borrow from other households. In Tegula, who shall we borrow from? There is no one: we are all poor in grain. If we want to borrow, we have to go outside. But it is very difficult to borrow from outside. Our grain is poor; no one wants to loan to us. So, we have a problem to borrow (Haile Selassie Maros, farmer, Tegula).

Survey results reflect this distinction between the villages. Only 34% of surveyed households in Tegula cited borrowing as a primary strategy for coping with grain deficits, as compared to 72% in Enda Mariyam. In this regard, rather than indicating poverty, the higher incidence of grain indebtedness in Enda Mariyam is evidence of that village's greater wealth in grain. In Tegula, the most frequently cited strategy for coping with deficits is the sale of labour.

3.4 Wage-Labour

There is not much hiring of labour within either Enda Mariyam or Tegula villages. Most households manage the tasks of agricultural and domestic production alone. Further, few households can afford the relatively high costs of hiring agricultural labour.⁴³ Consequently, when additional labour is required - for example in weeding and cutting - it is almost always obtained on the basis of an equal exchange, known as *lifinti*, involving the reciprocal payment of labour on a day-for-day basis.

Lifinti arrangements typically occur between the same households for many years at a time and, in the case of weeding or cutting, among households within the same *got*, or neighborhood. In cases where people are close friends or close kin, labour may also be provided in expectation of an unspecified form of reciprocal support in the future. If reciprocity does not occur, however, free provision of labour will eventually cease.

Outside the village, labour is sold in towns within a day's walking distance, including in the regional capital, Makele. The importance of income earned through wage-labour for Enda Mariyam residents has grown in recent years, commensurate with the relative "boom" in urban construction since the end of the war. For example, in the

⁴³ Costs for hiring ploughing labour are considered later in the chapter.

late 1980s, an unskilled worker earned around 3 *birr* per day in Makele; in 1993, wages went as high as 10 *birr* per day. For this amount, Enda Mariyam residents say, even a relatively well-off farmer will try his luck to earn money in the towns.

Unlike Enda Mariyam, Tegula has a longer history of migration to the towns for wage-labour. Further, Tegula residents often travel farther for wage-earning opportunities, and remain away from the village for longer periods than people in Enda Mariyam. As one Tegula farmer explained:

If we don't have enough grain, we are forced to find work from October to June. We go far, even to Wolkeit. We save money from work and return to plant. If a family has nothing at all, no animals, they will even close up their house. If they have something, only one or two from the family will go. Even people who have animals will migrate like this for work, because they don't want to sell their animals (Ma-aza Meseret, farmer, Tegula).

Indeed, Tegula informants say that, were it not for the food aid they receive from the government, many more households would be engaged in this kind of longer-term migration than is presently the case.

3.5 Sale of Livestock

Livestock are vitally important to the production process of the household. Given their importance, households go to great lengths to avoid selling their animals.

Within a household, animals are typically owned by different members. Upon marriage, each spouse brings property, some of which will usually be in the form of livestock that remain under that partner's control. Similarly, when a child nears adulthood, parents will name one or several of the household's livestock as belonging to that child, to be handed over at the time of their marriage. Thus, each animal in the household is known to belong to a specific individual and should not be sold or traded without that person's consent. Control over livestock is also differentiated by gender. Chickens, cows, and calves are typically managed by women, whereas bulls and oxen are typically managed by men. Sheep and goats are typically controlled by the household head.

As noted earlier, households that own sheep or goats, as well as oxen, can use their small stock to protect oxen from sale in bad years; assuming there is a harvest failure, small stock can be sold first. Conversely, households that own an ox but no other livestock will be forced to sell this critical item of farm capital first. If crops fail for two consecutive years, however, even richer households may be forced to sell their oxen.

Although the sale of an ox represents a major risk for a household, some farmers do sell one ox just after the ploughing season. The reason for this is to obtain a large amount of cash at one time in order to purchase expensive necessities such as clothing, to build a house, or to pay back a debt. Because oxen will not be needed again for ploughing between December and early May, a farmer can sell an ox in December without too much risk, as long as he retains the ability to purchase a replacement ox in May, in time for the next ploughing season. In this way, a farmer can avoid the cost of oxen upkeep year-round.

These sales are distinct from what can be called "distress" sales of oxen. Distress sales occur when a household is forced to sell its oxen resources without the expectation of being able to replace those resources in the next season. When distress sales of oxen occur, a household may be en route to economic collapse. As will be seen in the following section, once a household falls off the ladder of oxen ownership, it is extremely difficult to climb back on.

4. Oxen and Wealth

Although they are intimately connected, it is oxen ownership rather than size of landholding that has the greatest influence on household wealth in the ox-plough farming system. Referring to the imperial period, when *risti* tenure predominated, McCann (1995: 78) argues that control over oxen played a more significant role in determining economic status than did rights in land:

Overall, the importance of oxen to the farming system and the possibility for seasonal transfer of cultivation rights rendered control over land itself a relatively weak factor in determining who gained access to the full set of

agricultural factors of production... Those who did not exercise rights over animal traction... had little opportunity to exercise the *de jure* rights they might have enjoyed through the land tenure system.

Bauer also emphasises the importance of oxen. He links the vulnerability of oxen in the Tigray ecological setting to social stratification, noting for example that, whereas in lush areas to the south such as Gojjam, big men loan land to their followers, in Tigray big men loan oxen (Bauer, 1975: 245).

For Bauer, oxen constitute the weak link in the Tigray agricultural system. The vulnerability of oxen Bauer noted in the late 1960s is still evident today. As described earlier, due to a dry climate and scarce pasture, the most important food source for cattle in Enda Mariyam is straw. The amount of straw that an individual farmer can produce, however, is a function of the amount of crops produced, itself largely a function of the area of land the farmer cultivates.

According to Bauer (1975: 242), the basic dilemma facing Tigray agriculture is that the average household does not cultivate enough land to produce enough straw to maintain a healthy team of oxen for ploughing:

One yoke of oxen is more than enough to plow the household's land. The household's land, however, is not enough to support the oxen. The household... cannot supply sufficient straw to feed the oxen, plus the cows and calves necessary for a continued supply. The average household's undernourished oxen are easy prey to bovine diseases, such as rinderpest. Under these circumstances, I would suggest that there will always be poor households seeking the economic protection of capital rich households.

Bauer points to a central feature of the Tigray farm economy; namely, the association between oxen ownership and wealth. Capital-rich households - that is, households that own a team of oxen - possess a myriad of advantages in the farming enterprise that enable them to maximise their income from crop production, and hence their wealth. Chief among these is the ability to expand the area of land that is cultivated, through rental agreements. Expanding the area of cultivation, in turn, greatly improves the chances that the household will be able to hold on to its oxen in the next growing season, because it increases the amount of straw available for fodder. Consequently, households that own a team of oxen tend to retain them over time.

Conversely, capital-poor households - that is, households that own no oxen - find it extremely difficult to acquire farm capital. Not only is the area of land they cultivate smaller but many are forced to rent out some or even most of their plots in order to obtain any income from their landholding. Because of the particular terms of land rental, discussed below, when a household rents out land it forfeits the straw harvest from that land. With less straw, a household cannot hope to maintain oxen; without oxen, a household cannot increase the area it farms to obtain more straw. Capital-poor households face a myriad of other kinds of disadvantages in the farming enterprise that make it extremely difficult for them to maximise their income from crop production, and hence their wealth.

The association between oxen and wealth can be seen in the household survey in Enda Mariyam. Whereas the average number of people per surveyed household was found to be 4.27 people, capital-rich households were consistently bigger in size, comprising an average of 5.0 people. Capital-poor households, on the other hand, were consistently smaller, averaging only 3.53 people. More importantly, capital-rich households tend to have more grain. Some 70% of capital-rich households had enough grain in store to use for seed in the 1993/94 agricultural season, without having to borrow or purchase seed in the market. For capital-poor households, however, only 22% were in this position in 1993, while 69% had to borrow grain to make up for deficits in their own seed supply. Similarly, only 7% of capital-rich households borrowed grain in 1993, as compared to 44% of capital-poor households.

In Enda Mariyam, a minority of households control a majority of oxen resources. This is also true for the village of Tegula, which has a very different profile from Enda Mariyam not only in terms of crop production but also in terms of the amount of pasturage available for livestock. Tegula has a much larger *hazati*, or grazing area, and is consequently able to support a larger aggregate cattle population. Nevertheless, the distribution of oxen ownership among surveyed households in both Enda Mariyam and Tegula in 1993 was remarkably similar, as indicated in Table 1.

| TABLE 1: Oxen distribution among surveyed households, Enda Mariyam and Tegula, 1993 | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Enda Mariyam (128 HHs) | Tegula (51 HHs) |
| HHs owning 0 oxen | 32.0 % | 39.2 % |
| HHs owning 1 ox | 44.5 % | 41.2 % |
| HHs owning 2 oxen | 21.9 % | 15.7 % |
| HHs owning 3 oxen | 1.6 % | 4.0 % |

What is interesting about Table 1 is that oxen appear to be distributed between households in roughly similar patterns, in two very different villages. One reason for this is the substantively greater advantage possessing a team of oxen confers on a household. As noted above, this includes the ability to increase the area of cultivation through renting in additional plots of land, which in turn increases both grain and straw yields. It also includes the ability to plough the land an optimum number of times.

Capital-rich households gain additional benefits from hiring out oxen to capital-poor households, including the receipt of labour, grain, and straw in payment. In Enda Mariyam, capital-rich households almost always loan out their oxen for some days each year, while capital-poor households, if they wish to cultivate their own land, have no other choice but to hire oxen. Hence, households that lack oxen are dependent on households that own oxen if they are to farm. In this regard, the pattern of oxen distribution between households has important implications for the dynamics of local relations of dependence.

There are few detailed descriptions of how transactions for farm capital operate at village level. Studies typically focus on the distribution of capital between households at a fixed point in time, rather than the means by which capital is exchanged between households. Exceptions include Chiari (1996) and McCann (1995). The lack of detailed investigation of transactions for agricultural capital has led to some confusion in the literature. For example, Save the Children (1993: 49) report that: "The most common type of payment for the hire of a team of oxen are a half-share of the harvest... labour on the oxen-owner's fields... or the provision of crop residue".

However, informants in both Enda Mariyam and Tegula insisted that oxen hire is never paid for with a share of harvest, and that this only occurs in the context of land rental agreements.

In a setting where approximately three-quarters of households do not own a team of oxen - and hence face the central dilemma of how to obtain oxen through exchange or hire - transactions for farm capital constitute a central feature of the local farm economy. Further, there are definite conventions governing these transactions. Although individual agreements will vary, depending on the relationship between the persons involved and the relative wealth of each, informants in Enda Mariyam were nevertheless consistent in their description of the normative terms by which such transactions operate.

In the following section, these terms are described in some detail for Enda Mariyam; some comparative examples from Tegula are also included where they illustrate key points. In the course of these descriptions, the advantages and disadvantages that accrue to households at different levels of capital ownership are explored, as well as the implications for the structure of economic relationships in the village. Findings from the household survey are used throughout, to identify common practices.⁴⁴

5. Obtaining Farm Capital

5.1 Oxen Hire - *Siso*, *Gimit*, and *Edag*

As shown in Table 1, 32% of surveyed households in Enda Mariyam and 39% in Tegula own no oxen. The ways these households arranged to farm in the 1993/94 agricultural year are shown in Table 2.

⁴⁴ For some variables, the survey results refer to a relatively small number of households in each village. Due to this, and to the lack of random selection of the overall sample frame, the survey cannot claim to be statistically representative of all households in Enda Mariyam and Tegula. Hence, survey results are used in this chapter to illustrate, rather than demonstrate, key aspects of local farm economies. Survey results do serve to highlight aspects of local practice that have not received much attention to date. Results were tabulated during the period of fieldwork and checked with key informants.

| TABLE 2: Farming arrangements of oxenless households, Enda Mariyam and Tegula, 1993 | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------|
| | Enda Mariyam (41 HHs) | Tegula (20 HHs) |
| Rented out most plots, did not plough | 36.0 % | 45.0 % |
| Hired oxen | 37.0 % | 40.0 % |
| Obtained free loan of oxen | 20.0 % | 10.0 % |
| Yoked own bull with ox of another household | 7.0 % | 5.0 % |

Table 2 indicates the significance of land rental to households that own no oxen. Land rental is considered in the next section. Obtaining free loans of oxen was significant for a small number of households in both villages. It is also the case that an oxenless household that owns a bull or cow will sometimes be able to pair this animal with the ox of another household, in a yoking arrangement known as *lifinti*. However, informants say this is not common practice; bulls are difficult to handle and slow the work of ploughing, and cows are prioritised for milk and calf production.

Aside from opting out of crop production, oxen hire is the only practical option for most capital-poor households. There are three main types of oxen hire, known in Enda Mariyam as *siso*, *gimit*, and *edag*. Table 3 indicates the form of payment for each arrangement, as well as the amounts that were paid in 1993.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ With the exception of the number of labour days, which do not vary, amounts indicated in Table 3 reflect oxen hire prices following a year of relatively good harvest. Hence, the price of oxen hire in straw is higher than would be the case following a year of poor harvest, when a shortage of straw would drive its value up. Amounts of cash and grain typically vary depending on the difficulty of ploughing. In 1993, excessive rains caused water-logging on many plots and made the work of ploughing more strenuous; hence, the price of oxen hire in grain or cash in 1993 was slightly higher than would otherwise be the case.

| TABLE 3: Terms of payment for oxen hire, Enda Mariyam, 1993 | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | 1 ox/day | 2 oxen/day | 2 oxen/day and labour |
| <i>Siso:</i> (labour) | 1 day of labour | 2 days of labour | 2 days of labour |
| <i>Gimit:</i> (cash or grain) | 10-15 <i>birr</i> or 24 <i>menelik</i> ⁴⁶ | 20-30 <i>birr</i> or 48 <i>menelik</i> | 25-35 <i>birr</i> or 48 <i>menelik</i> |
| <i>Edag:</i> (Straw) | 1 <i>tsor</i> ⁴⁷ <i>taf</i> or 3 <i>tsor</i> other grain | 2 <i>tsor taf</i> or 6 <i>tsor</i> other grain | 3 <i>tsor taf</i> or 9 <i>tsor</i> other grain |

As Table 3 shows, it is possible to hire a single ox, a team of oxen - known as a *tsimdi* - or a team of oxen plus the ploughing labour of the oxen owner. Hiring a single ox is rare; typically, a single ox is paired in a *lifinti* arrangement (see below).

Siso, meaning literally "one-third", denotes oxen hire paid for with labour, where the farmer pays with two days of work for each day a *tsimdi* is loaned. The labour provided as payment is usually ploughing labour for the oxen owner, but it may include other kinds of agricultural work, such as weeding, cutting, and threshing, depending on the specific agreement. However, few oxen owners will enter a *siso* agreement if they are not assured the hiring farmer is able-bodied enough to plough for them; for this reason, *siso* is used exclusively by men.

Siso is not a preferred practice in Enda Mariyam, although some oxenless households are forced to use it. This is because it entails significant penalties in terms of the amount of time a farmer will have left to plough his own land. A poor farmer with no oxen might only be able to plough his land for eight or nine days, because he will be required to provide double that amount - 16 to 18 days - to an oxen-owning

⁴⁶ Approximately 0.6 kilograms. See Appendix 4.

⁴⁷ *Tsor* is a bundle of straw, sometimes also referred to as *timri*. It is roughly the amount of straw that can be held in a cotton shawl, or *kuta*.

farmer. Consequently, an oxenless farmer will prefer, whenever possible, to hire oxen days with straw rather than labour. Capital-poor households in Enda Mariyam have a better capacity to do this than capital-poor households in Tegula, due to the greater productivity of their land.

Gimit - meaning, literally, "approximate" - is the name for oxen hire in exchange for either grain or cash. The name derives from the fact that a farmer will not know the exact amount of grain or cash that should be paid in any given year, since this depends on the difficulty of ploughing and the quality of the previous year's harvest, which determines grain supply and demand. Hence, the payment amount for oxen hire is "approximate".⁴⁸

Because of the high cost involved, *gimit* is rarely practised. In Enda Mariyam, only three households paid for oxen with cash or grain in 1993; in Tegula, no households did. Even when a household does hire oxen days through *gimit*, it is unlikely they will obtain *all* oxen days in this way.

The most common form of payment for oxen hire in Enda Mariyam is straw. Capital-rich households are almost always in the market for additional straw to maintain their livestock. Capital-poor households, on the other hand, have less need of straw, especially if they have no other livestock. Instead, they will harvest straw and either sell it outright, or use it to hire oxen. Straw is typically expensive in years following a poor harvest, when the price may rise to 10 *birr* per *tsor*. However, following the poor harvest of 1993/94, many capital-rich households in Enda Mariyam found themselves having to purchase some amount of straw to preserve their oxen.

Hiring oxen for straw is known as *edag*. *Edag* transactions are frequently arranged just after the harvest, when it is apparent how much straw will be available. At this time, a capital-rich household may out their oxen for a specified number of days in the next ploughing season, in exchange for the immediate delivery of a specified amount of straw. The name *edag* - meaning "purchase" - refers to the fact that oxen days are often "purchased" directly after the harvest.

⁴⁸ I am indebted to Feseha Alemayhu of the Tigray Development Association for explaining the literal meaning of this word as applied to this practice.

Arrangements for oxen hire in Tegula follow the same normative terms as in Enda Mariyam. However, there are interesting differences between the two villages in terms of what types of oxen hire is most common. Whereas in Enda Mariyam, oxen are usually paid for with straw, oxen hire in Tegula is usually paid for with labour (*siso*). Since Tegula generally produces a lower crop yield than Enda Mariyam, straw is in shorter supply; straw is also in less demand in Tegula due to its larger pastureland. Further, Tegula farmers insisted they could not afford to pay for oxen with either cash or grain:

We never hire oxen with grain. In Enda Mariam, there is enough grain to do this. They can even hire oxen with cash. But here, we don't; we give our labour. If you have grain, it's better to sell it and buy an animal for yourself, instead of hiring one (Haile Selassie Maros, farmer, Tegula).

What these transactions for oxen hire suggest is that, as long as a household owns a team of oxen, it has the potential to obtain all other inputs necessary for production, including labour, grain for seed or cash to purchase seed, and straw to maintain oxen. Conversely, oxenless households can theoretically "buy" as many oxen days as they need, as long as they have the capacity to pay for them. As one farmer observed, "If you have enough straw and grain, you don't have to be afraid of not having oxen."

However, oxen hire involves a structural penalty in the farming enterprise that cannot be mitigated by simply purchasing more oxen days, assuming a capital-poor household has the wherewithal to do so (which is rare). Regardless of the form of payment involved, capital-rich households will rarely hire out their oxen during optimum periods for ploughing. Such times include right after a light rainfall when ploughing is easiest, and early enough in the planting season to ensure the growth of long-maturing crops such as *taf*. Oxen-rich household typically prioritise oxen on their own land during these periods.

The result is that oxenless households often lag behind in ploughing and planting. In effect, oxenless households are unable to control the timing of these two key activities on their land. Poor timing for ploughing and planting can sometimes be as important a factor in reducing yields as the number of times that ploughing occurs.

At the same time, it is rare that a capital-poor household is in a position to obtain more than a minimum number of ploughing days through oxen hire. With regard to *siso*, there is a limit on the number of days a farmer can work in exchange for oxen and still have enough time left over to farm for themselves. With regard to *edag* and *gimit*, it is unlikely an oxenless household will have enough straw or grain from crop production alone to hire more than a small number of oxen days.

Further, given the limits placed on the amount of ploughing an individual ox will be made to do, there is a limit on the number of oxen days available for purchase in the village overall. Farmers watch carefully the number of days they allow an individual ox to plough. Undernourished or sick oxen will not be required to work the same amount as healthy oxen, mainly because, due to the high cost of their replacement, it is better to reduce the number of ploughing times than to see an ox die. For the calendar year 1994, the average cost of a 6-year old healthy ox in Hagre Selam market was 838 *birr*, ranging from 650 *birr* in January to 1,150 *birr* in July.

The result is that capital-poor households almost always lack enough oxen days to plough all of their land more than the minimum number of times. As one informant noted, "The poor don't plough well and don't get a good harvest."

5.2 Pairing - *Lifinti*

As indicated in Table 1, 44% of households surveyed in Enda Mariyam, and 41% of households in Tegula, own only a single ox. Table 4 shows how such households arranged to farm in the 1993/94 agricultural season.

| TABLE 4: Farming arrangements of single-ox households, Enda Mariyam and Tegula, 1993 | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------|
| | Enda Mariyam (57 HHs) | Tegula (21 HHs) |
| Paired (<i>lifinti</i>) | 81.0 % | 86.0 % |
| Yoked bull/cow with ox of another HH | 16.0 % | 9.0 % |
| Hired second ox | 3.0 % | 0 % |
| Rented out most plots, did not plough | 0 % | 5.0 % |

As Table 4 indicates, the majority of single-ox households solve the problem of ploughing through an arrangement known as *lifinti*. In *lifinti* agreements, farmers arrange to pair their single ox with the ox of another household, on a day-for-day reciprocal basis.

In some cases, *lifinti* arrangements for oxen are carried on between the same two farmers for many consecutive years. Given a choice, farmers say they prefer to pair with the same ox in each successive year, mainly because its strength and character will be known. Pairing with a badly trained or weak ox slows ploughing considerably, and farmers who own such animals find it much more difficult to enter into *lifinti* agreements. At the same time, informants note that *lifinti* agreements are subject to change at any time, since the oxen ownership of a household may change.

Lifinti arrangements between households at different levels of oxen ownership are rare. This is because a household that owns two or more oxen can abrogate a *lifinti* agreement in advance of ploughing, without necessarily jeopardizing its own ploughing schedule. Nevertheless, if a single-ox owning household cannot find another ox to pair with, they may be forced into this kind of situation.

Aside from the necessity of arranging *lifinti* agreements in each agricultural year, single-ox households face another dilemma: namely, the fact that one ox will be

forced to work more total days per year. Table 5 compares the number of days worked by oxen in six different case-study households in Enda Mariyam.⁴⁹

| TABLE 5: Oxen inputs for 6 case-study households, Enda Mariyam, 1994/95 agricultural year | | | |
|--|----------------------|------------------------------|--|
| | Number of oxen owned | Total ox days used to plough | Number of days worked by each ox in HH |
| HH 1: | 2 | 32.4 | 16.2 |
| HH 2: | 2 | 45.5 | 22.75 |
| HH 3: | 1 | 29.0 | 29.0 |
| HH 4: | 1 | 26.5 | 26.5 |
| HH 5: | 1 | 33.0 | 33.0 |
| HH 6: | 0 | 5.0 ⁵⁰ | — |

The last column of Table 5 illustrates the difference in having one ox versus two. For those households with a team of oxen, each ox is required to work fewer total days. For those households with one ox, however, the labour burden is increased, since not only does the ox have to plough the household's own land but it must also plough the land of others in fulfillment of pairing agreements. For Household 5, the one ox of this household worked more than twice as many days as either ox of Household 1. As the head of Household 5 said, "It is a problem if you have one ox, because this is a lot of work. Only a strong ox can do this." Thus, single-ox owning farmers are sometimes forced to reduce the number of days they plough, to accommodate the limits of oxen strength.

⁴⁹ The case-study households range in wealth from "rich" to "middle" to "poor", according to local definitions. They also include two female-headed households. See Appendix 1, Section 4.5.

⁵⁰ The oxen days noted here were a free loan to Household 6, used to plough one plot close to the homestead: all other plots in the household were rented out to other farmers in 1993.

6. Land Rental - *Mewfar*

The household survey indicates that all households in Enda Mariyam have land, comprised of the individual plots of their members. There are, however, some men and women resident in established households who have reached the legal age of adulthood but have not yet received an adult 1/2 *gibri* share of land. Some 16% of surveyed households in both Enda Mariyam and Tegula had such a "landless adult" in residence. Typically, these people access land by farming with their parental household, by renting, or by marrying a spouse with an adult land share. The dynamic between land and marriage is considered further in Chapter 5. For our purposes here the discussion focuses on established households.

Importantly, a household's landholding is not necessarily equivalent to the area it actually cultivates. This is illustrated in Table 6.

| TABLE 6: Land area farmed for 6 case-study households, Enda Mariyam, 1994 | | | |
|--|--------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| No. in HH | <i>Tsimdi</i> Held | Total <i>tsimdi</i> farmed | Rented land as % of total farmed |
| HH 1: 5 | 4.90 | 6.10 | 19.7 % |
| HH 2: 6 | 5.80 | 8.96 | 35.3 % |
| HH 3: 3 | 4.50 | 5.75 | 21.7 % |
| HH 4: 4 | 4.88 | 5.38 | 9.3 % |
| HH 5: 2 | 4.25 | 4.25 | 0 % |
| HH 6: 7 | 7.50 | 3.00 | - 60.0 % |

Table 6 shows the relationship between household size and landholding. Household 6 with seven members has the most land, while Household 5 with two members has the least. When it comes to land actually farmed, however, things look rather different. Household 6 actually farms the least amount of land, while Household 2 farms the most. This is because households are renting in or renting out land. The last column in the table indicates the effect on total area farmed of land rental. In the case of Household 2, the area of land cultivated was increased by 35% through renting in plots. In the case of Household 6, the area of land cultivated was reduced by 60% due to renting out plots.

In a context where individual households have small landholdings, where oxen are in short supply, and where oxen ownership is fluid, land rental allows for flexible adjustments of capital (oxen) to land. In this regard, it can be seen as a structural feature of the ox-plough farming complex. This is borne out by the household survey, which indicates that land rental is a common practice. In Enda Mariyam, some 20% of surveyed households rented in plots of land in the 1993/94 agricultural season, while some 23% rented plots out to other farmers. Equivalent percentages for Tegula are 26% and 37%, respectively. Hence, approximately a quarter of all households are involved in land rental.

Land rental, like all issues associated with land in Ethiopia, is a politicised topic. Exploitative rental practices in the south, and the elites they supported, were a primary target of the Derg's land reform programme. The association of tenancy with the oppression of non-Amhara nationalities in the south, and the commonly held assumption that tenancy leads to poor land-use practices (see Ege, 1994), have tended to obscure the actual workings of land rental at local level. For this reason, I prefer the more neutral term "land rental", rather than "tenancy" or "sharecropping".

Although sometimes confused,⁵¹ land rental (*mewfar*) and oxen hire are distinct arrangements. Whereas oxen hire involves the loan of oxen (and sometimes ploughing labour) only, land rental involves the seasonal transfer of land use rights on a particular plot of land. Once an agreement is made between two households for the rental of a specific plot, the landholder relinquishes all involvement in farming on that plot. In some cases, the landholder may contribute labour for tasks such as weeding and cutting, but in Enda Mariyam this is rare. More importantly, it is the tenant who decides what crops will be planted and who manages all aspects of the production process.

Most land rental transactions are oral agreements between two heads of households. In some cases, a *wahas* will be called in as a witness. Informants in Enda Mariyam say this is unusual, however, since the majority of rental agreements are transacted between people who have a mutual expectation that whatever terms are negotiated

⁵¹ See, for example, Save the Children (1993: 49).

will be honoured. As one farmer put it, "You must be able to trust each other". Further, the majority of land rental agreements are transacted between households living in the same village. Thus, it is often the case that landlord and tenant have a pre-existing relationship. A majority of landlords, for example, are female heads of households; it is not uncommon for these landlords to rent land to men with whom they are having a sexual relationship. In addition, monks often rent plots to farmers who depend upon them for loans of grain.

Normative terms for land rental in Enda Mariyam are as follows: the tenant provides all of the seed and labour (including oxen) and in return takes a half-share of the crop yield, as well as all of the crop residue (straw). The division of the harvest takes place at the threshing floor, when the tenant calls the landlord to witness the measuring of grain into sacks. Shortly thereafter, the landlord is expected to pay the tenant half the amount of seed that was used on that plot of land. If seed is not repaid, it is assumed that the plot in question will be re-rented again by the same tenant in the following year.

In addition to these basic terms, the practice of giving a gift of grain or cash to the landlord - known as *mewgaya* - has evolved over time in Enda Mariyam. Because the village has a small amount of arable land, there is usually more demand to rent land in than to rent land out. Consequently, households that hold good quality plots are often in a position to bargain with prospective tenants. Tenants may also offer a grain or cash loan to the landholder as added inducement. Such loans should be repaid immediately after the harvest; if they are not, the tenant has the automatic right to re-rent the same plot in the next season.

The land rental market tends to expand or contract depending on the harvest. In 1993, for example, almost all households who had the necessary capital in Enda Mariyam sought to rent in additional land, and a market for land developed that drove the price of *mewgaya* upwards to around 2 *gebeta* of grain (approximately 40 kilograms) for fertile plots. In 1994, however, the rental market contracted, as fewer farmers could afford to rent in land due to shortage of seed. Not only did the value of *mewgaya* decline markedly but many households seeking to rent out land had to search for tenants, and settle for basic terms without additional gifts or loans. Chiari

(1996) notes the same contraction of the land rental market in his area of study following a poor harvest in 1994.

In theory, rental agreements are renegotiated annually. In practice, it is not uncommon for rental agreements to continue between the same households for several years consecutively. According to informants, farmers prefer to re-rent the same plots of land because they acquire knowledge of their particular features and fertility. Especially for good quality land, it will usually be the landholder, rather than the tenant, who breaks off the agreement in order to find more favourable terms.

Notably, one way tenants try to hold on to rented land from year to year is to demonstrate they are taking good care of it. As one man noted:

I think of the land I rent as mine. If I work it well, I can keep it for a long time. I work harder on my rented land than on my own land. That way, the owner will be happy, and he will rent to me again... I will say to him 'I worked many things on the land, so rent to me again' (Alem Techliwoini, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

Working the land "well" includes crop rotation for soil regeneration, frequent ploughings, and thorough weeding. In this regard, it is interesting to note that land rental does not necessarily act as a disincentive to land husbandry as is commonly assumed, at least for the most desirable plots.

Normative terms for land rental transactions in Tegula differ from those of Enda Mariyam. In Tegula, rents are not always half of the crop yield; rather, they vary from one-half to one-third to as little as one-fourth, depending on the quality of the land in question. In general, rents rise as land quality improves, but payment of more than one-third of the crop yield to the landholder is relatively rare in Tegula. According to Tegula informants, farmers living in the southern parts of Dega Tembien *wereda* pay one-half the crop yield in rent because their land is more fertile. Indeed, Tegula farmers were able to draw a line through a map of the *wereda*, indicating where rents rose to one-half, commensurate with the prevalence of more fertile soil.

Larger annual grain deficits in Tegula help explain another variation in rental practices. Whereas in Enda Mariyam, giving a *mewgaya* to landholders has become a regular feature of rental agreements, *mewgaya* are rare in Tegula. In cases where a

landholder has a particularly good plot of land on offer, they will sometimes ask for a gift; more commonly, they will simply raise the percentage of crop yield the tenant must pay. This is because grain is at a premium in Tegula, and rarely used in transactions when other forms of payment can be substituted.

7. The Dynamics of Local Political Economies

7.1 Oxen and Land

Having outlined the terms for access to oxen and land, it is now possible to consider how oxen and land interrelate to structure local political economies. To begin, Table 7 examines the distribution of oxen among households involved in land rental in 1993.

| TABLE 7: Land rental and oxen ownership, Enda Mariyam and Tegula, 1993 | | |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| a) Households renting in land (tenants): | | |
| | Enda Mariyam (30 HHs) | Tegula (19 HHs) |
| 0-ox households | 0 % | 0 % |
| 1-ox households | 52.0 % | 53.8 % |
| 2-ox households | 44.0 % | 38.5 % |
| 3 ox households | 4.0 % | 7.7 % |
| b) Households renting out land: (landlords) | | |
| | Enda Mariyam (25 HHs) | Tegula (13 HHs) |
| 0-ox households | 76.7 % | 68.4 % |
| 1-ox households | 16.7 % | 26.3 % |
| 2-ox households | 6.7 % | 5.3 % |

Table 7 indicates the close link between oxen ownership and land rental. Renting in land occurs exclusively among oxen-owning households; renting out land occurs overwhelmingly among oxenless households. Given the association between oxen and wealth, this means that the poor tend to act as the landlords of the rich, a situation the reverse of what is usually found in peasant economies.

As the table shows, the ability to expand one's area of cultivation, and thus increase one's income from crop production, is concentrated in the hands of oxen-owning households. In Enda Mariyam, a team of oxen can relatively easily cover both the average household's landholding, plus four or five additional plots rented in. Hence, assuming that it has able-bodied male labour, households that own two oxen have little difficulty expanding their area of cultivation. According to survey results for Enda Mariyam, 39% of households that owned two oxen rented in some land in 1993.

As well as increasing their income from crop production, capital-rich households benefit from land rental in another important way - through the acquisition of additional straw. The ability to acquire straw through land rental confers a substantial advantage on oxen-owning households, by enabling them to store an adequate supply of fodder for their oxen during the dry season. Hence, land rental provides a mechanism for oxen-owning households to maintain themselves at the same level of oxen ownership over time. Oxen-owning households that do not rent in land are almost always forced to arrange other types of transactions for straw.

At the same time, it is not possible for a capital-rich household to expand its area of cultivation indefinitely, due to structural limitations within the farming system. First, such households will be unable to command enough additional ploughing labour to cover a very large area of land during the short ploughing and planting intervals. As will be seen in the next chapter, this has not always been the case; prior to land reform, "big men" did cultivate very large areas of land. Second, although they are relatively better off in terms of grain supply, capital-rich households will not have enough additional grain to use as seed to cover a large land area. Consequently, it is rare for oxen-owning households to acquire more than an additional hectare of land through renting.⁵²

⁵² The estimate is based on the amount of land rented in by Household Number 2 in 1994, who acquired an additional 3.16 *tsimdi*, or approximately 0.8 hectares. This represents the largest amount of land rented in by any of the case-study households. Household Number 2 is headed by one of the most active farmers in the village. He told me that 3 *tsimdi* was about the limit of what he could rent in and still manage to farm all his own holding. Discussions with farmers more generally confirmed there is this kind of upper limit to land rental. No measurement of amounts rented in were made for farmers in the village as a whole, however.

With regard to households that own a single ox, Table 7 provides an interesting finding: namely, that tenants are mainly single-ox owners. This may be due to the general prevalence of single-ox households in the village. As Table 1 above showed, 44% of surveyed households in Enda Mariyam (and 41% in Tegula) own a single ox. The significance of this number of "middle" wealth households is considered in the next chapter.

However, a key reason why oxen-owning households rent in land is to improve the quality of the plots they farm. Especially where farmers have a ceiling on the oxen days available to them, they may prefer to rent in a small number of fertile plots, rather than farm a larger number of less fertile plots. In this regard, a farmer may actually rent in a plot of land with fertile soil, while simultaneously renting *out* a plot from his own holding of poor quality soil.⁵³ By this means, single-ox households can, to some extent, compensate for having only one ox by improving the quality of the land they farm through renting.

An example is the case of Yohanis Elifeh, a farmer living in Endabazbanom *got* of Enda Mariyam. In 1994, Yohanis Elifeh expended considerable time and energy to ensure he was able to re-rent a plot of extremely fertile soil in the village. The landholder in question was a woman named Freya with whom Yohanis Elifeh was having a sexual relationship, a not uncommon occurrence. Freya wanted to rent this plot of land to another farmer, who had offered her better terms. The case eventually came before the *ferdi bayto*, where Yohanis Elifeh insisted he could not afford to lose the fight to rent the plot again, because, "Without this piece of land, I cannot get a good harvest, because it is better than what I have myself."

Households that lack oxen, on the other hand, have trouble arranging to plough their landholding even a minimum number of times. Rather than leave some land uncultivated, oxenless households prefer to rent out some or most of the plots in their holding. According to survey results, 56% of oxenless households in Enda Mariyam and 65% of oxenless households in Tegula rented out some land in 1993.

⁵³ Although this is rare, the survey recorded two households in Tegula who both rented in and rented out land in 1993.

By renting out land, an oxenless household ensures itself a partial income even though it lacks the resources to farm. Land rental thus provides a kind of "safety net" for capital-poor households, giving them the chance to recover in the next year. However, when a household rents out all of its land, it becomes more difficult to recover because of the grain and straw that is forfeit to the tenant.⁵⁴ Consequently, households that rent out most of their holding in one year undermine the chances of acquiring oxen or oxen days to farm independently in the following year. Although it is possible to negotiate for larger gift or loans in years following a good harvest, these are rarely enough to compensate for the loss of grain that renting implies. As a result, households that rent out most of their land tend to remain in the position of being poor landlords over time.

7.2 Land and Gender

Significantly, the majority of poor landlords are female-headed households. This is illustrated in Table 8.

| TABLE 8: Land rental and sex of household head, Enda Mariyam and Tegula, 1993 | | |
|--|---------------------|---------------|
| a) Households renting in land (tenants): | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| Female-headed | 4.0 % | 0 % |
| Male-headed | 96.0 % | 100.0 % |
| b) Households renting out land (landlords): | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| Female-headed | 76.7 % | 52.6 % |
| Male-headed | 23.3 % | 47.4 % |

⁵⁴ Chiari (1996: 23) notes that straw may be divided equally between landholder and tenant, where the landlord provides half the seed and half the labour. This is not the case in Enda Mariyam, however; the tenant always takes straw. In Tegula, an equal division of straw resources only occurs when rents are one-half the crop yield, which is rare.

As Table 8 indicates, male-headed households comprise the vast majority of those who rent in additional land, while female-headed households comprise the majority of those who rent out land. Stated another way, out of all female-headed households surveyed in Enda Mariyam, 74% rented out land in 1993. Male-headed households also comprise the vast majority of those that farm only their own landholdings. In Enda Mariyam, 90% of households that were neither tenants nor landlords in 1993 were male-headed.

The reasons for this have to do with the gender division of labour. As noted earlier, women do not plough in Enda Mariyam. Hence, female-headed households can only farm if they have adult male labour available. Typically, this will be male labour resident in the household, including sons who have not yet separated to establish their own households but who are nevertheless old enough to work the land. Male labour may also be available from sons-in-law, where the newly married daughter is still resident in the parental household. Household 4 in the case study is a female-headed household with two adult sons in residence; as noted in Table 6, this household not only farmed its own land in 1994 but rented in additional land.

Although it is possible for female-headed households to hire ploughing labour, they rarely have the resources to do so. Table 9 shows the cost of ploughing labour.

| TABLE 9: Cost per day of ploughing labour, Enda Mariyam, 1993 | | |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | Cash | Grain |
| Jan.-Feb. | 4-5 <i>birr</i> plus food | 6-7 <i>menelik</i> plus food |
| March-April | 6-7 <i>birr</i> plus food | 8-9 <i>menelik</i> plus food |
| June-July | 7-8 <i>birr</i> plus food | 9-10 <i>menelik</i> plus food |

As Table 9 indicates, the cost of ploughing labour varies depending on the time of year; highest costs are associated with the planting season in June and July. Since this is the critical ploughing period, if labour is hired it will tend to be hired at this time.

However, out of seven female-headed households in Enda Mariyam that farmed their own land in 1993, only one could afford to hire male labour for ploughing. This was made possible by virtue of cash remittances to the household from a male relative living in Hagre Selam. The remaining six female-headed households were only able to farm by virtue of the free provision of labour from sons and sons-in-law.

More commonly, female-headed households lack male labour for ploughing or have access to such labour for only a very limited number of days per year. These will almost always be insufficient, however, to cover the household's landholding. Hence, most female-headed households rent out land. In this regard, the shortage of male labour is a constraining factor for female-headed households in the farming enterprise. More significant, however, is the fact that oxen tend to be concentrated in the hands of male-headed households.

7.3 Gender and Oxen

Table 10 shows the distribution of oxen ownership among male and female-headed households in Enda Mariyam and Tegula in 1993.

| TABLE 10: Sex of household head and oxen distribution, Enda Mariyam and Tegula, 1993 | | |
|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| a) Female-headed: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam (31 HHs) | Tegula (15 HHs) |
| Own 0 ox | 74.2 % | 80.0 % |
| Own 1 ox | 16.1 % | 20.0 % |
| Own 2 oxen | 9.7 % | 0 % |
| b) Male-headed: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam (97 HHs) | Tegula (36 HHs) |
| Own 0 ox | 18.6 % | 22.2 % |
| Own 1 ox | 53.6 % | 50.0 % |
| Own 2 oxen | 25.8 % | 22.2 % |
| Own 3 or 4 oxen | 2.1 % | 5.6 % |

Table 10 shows the concentration of oxen resources amongst male-headed households. Conversely, the table shows that around three-quarters of female-headed households in Enda Mariyam own no oxen at all. Stated another way, out of all oxenless households surveyed in Enda Mariyam, 56% are headed by women.

The disparity in oxen ownership shown in Table 10 is also linked to the gender division of labour. For female-headed households that lack male labour, investment in oxen does not necessarily make sense, since their ability to make use of oxen is limited by the cultural association of ploughing with the male sphere. With a small number of exceptions, female-headed households in Enda Mariyam that lacked regular access to male labour said they preferred to invest in livestock associated with domestic production, such as cows for milk and butter, and chickens for sale or consumption. Even when women express an interest in acquiring oxen, they are confronted with strongly rooted notions concerning their ability to make use of such capital, in the absence of an adult male in the household.

One such woman is Medhin, who tried to obtain a cash loan from the government to purchase an ox in 1993. Since cash available from the government for oxen purchase is limited, recipients are chosen by popular vote at *tabiya* meetings. Each person who requests a loan must publicly demonstrate that they are among the poorest farmers, and that they will be able to make good use of the ox. Medhin made her case to the *tabiya* meeting, noting that she expected free loans of ploughing labour from male relatives. She was challenged, however, by male farmers who insisted that she would be unable to make maximum use of the ox, and that she would be unlikely to have the wherewithal to pay back the loan. As one man argued, "A man can turn back the loan, but Medhin cannot because she cannot plough". Out of all households in Enda Mariyam elected to receive agricultural inputs in 1993, only three were female-headed; none of these received cash for oxen purchase.

In the absence of both male labour and oxen for ploughing, many female-headed households opt out of farming, and instead combine land rental with some other form of income-generating activity. This includes basket making, *sewa* (beer) production and sale, and hair braiding. Typically, female-headed households will rent out most of their holding, especially plots that are some distance away, but will keep a small amount of land close to the homestead for their own use. In this regard, the

concentration of oxen in the hands of male-headed households may be considered a structural feature of local farm economies in Tigray.⁵⁵ This means that wealth differentiation is not only distinguished by different levels of oxen ownership; it is also gendered. The poorest households in a village will normally be oxenless households headed by women.

8. Rich and Poor, Dependent and Independent

People in Enda Mariyam often speak of wealth differences in terms of dependence. This became evident in the course of wealth-ranking exercises in the neighbourhood of Endabazbanom, where informants were asked to sort households into piles according to wealth.⁵⁶ As expected, households owning a team of oxen were invariably placed in the "richest" pile, while households placed in the "poorest" pile were always oxenless; households in the "middle" wealth category typically owned a single ox.

When asked to explain why they had sorted the piles in a particular way, however, oxen ownership was not necessarily the first factor mentioned. Equally as telling was the extent to which the household could provide for its own consumption requirements without having to borrow from others in the village. As one informant put it, "If you have to depend on others, you are poor". Similar comments made during wealth-ranking exercises include the following:

His family can eat by themselves, without a loan. He can even give a loan to other people. He works for himself only; he farms independently. So I put him as "rich".

She is poor. She doesn't have enough grain. She borrows starting from *Fashiga* (Easter). She rents her land; she can't farm by herself.

He is not too bad. He is *mahkelay* (middle). His family can eat until *Meskerem* (September) without a loan. He can manage by himself.

⁵⁵ For the northeast highlands more generally, Save the Children (1993: 48) found that 81% of female-headed households own no oxen.

⁵⁶ See also Appendix 1, Section 3.4.

Independence is not only an economic goal in Tigray society; it is also considered a moral virtue. As Bauer (1977: 3) notes:

The Tigray *ethos* emphasizes individualism. One of its basic elements is that the individual is alone and that he must get along on his own wits and resources. "God helps those who help themselves" might be a good way of characterizing the Tigray *ethos*.

In this regard, one of the fringe benefits that richer households enjoy is to know that they are fulfilling their moral duty to "help themselves". However, as the material presented in this chapter has shown, less than a quarter of households in Enda Mariyam are in a position to achieve the goal of independence, because less than a quarter of households own the requisite farm capital.

Households that are capital-rich also tend to be grain rich. With adequate capital and grain, a household is in a position, barring unforeseen circumstances, to secure a subsistence livelihood over time. Capital-poor households have no such luxury; they are forced to depend, to varying degrees, on capital-rich households for access to farm capital in the context of seasonal transactions, and for access to grain in the context of loan agreements. Whereas capital-rich households can mitigate to some extent the risks they face in the ecological setting of Tigray agriculture, capital-poor households cannot; their vulnerability is always much greater.

If, as has been seen, a shortage of farm capital is a central feature of Tigray farm economies, then the dependence of the capital-poor upon the capital-rich is also a central feature of Tigray social life. At the same time, evidence suggests that the nature, depth and breadth of this dependence is different today from what it was during the pre-revolutionary period. When Bauer (1975: 242) published the results of his fieldwork in Hareyna village, he made a telling comment:

If economic dependence were the case for only a few households it would not be terribly interesting. However, 52 percent of the households in Hareyna were in a dependent relationship to the richest eight percent of the households.

It is this change in relationships of economic dependence, and the implications for the dynamics of social stratification in the village, that is explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4 - REFORM, WEALTH AND STATUS-HONOUR

1. Introduction

This chapter explores changes in local farm economies precipitated by the TPLF land reform. As Hoben (1996: iv) observes, there has been very little in-depth research on the impact of land tenure on local farm economies since 1975. Hoben is referring to the land reform programme of the Derg, implemented in all parts of Ethiopia under government control. If there has been little in-depth research on the impact of land reform in Derg-controlled areas, there has been even less for areas of Tigray under the control of the TPLF.⁵⁷ The chapter aims to describe some of the main effects of the land reform in terms of the characteristics of wealth differentiation in the village, and the dynamics of social stratification.

Although he is referring to other parts of Ethiopia, some of Hoben's (1996: 5) observations on the general effects of the Derg's land reform can also be applied to Tigray:

Land reform was successful in... reducing the inequality of peasant holdings...At the same time, (it) did not represent a total break with the past. It did not alter the household system of production, consumption and reproduction.

Similarly, the TPLF land reform did not alter the basic system of crop production in Tigray. It did not, for example, effect changes in local farm practices. Many of Bauer's descriptions of these practices in Hareyna village in the late 1960s could be equally applied to Enda Mariyam in the mid-1990s.

Further, the TPLF land reform did not alter one of the central problems of the ox-plough farming system - namely, gaining access to oxen in a context where, for ecological and demographic reasons, oxen are scarce (see McCann, 1995). The necessity of obtaining oxen for cultivation, combined with their scarcity, means there will always be some households in a dependent position in the farming enterprise

⁵⁷ The single exception I am aware of is Chiari (1996).

regardless of tenure arrangements. In this respect, land reform did not affect the importance of oxen to the production system, nor the association between oxen and wealth.

What the TPLF land reform did do was trigger changes in the distribution of wealth between peasant households, and in the magnitude of dependence faced by capital-poor households in the farming enterprise.

Changes in wealth differentiation after land reform are explored in the first part of the chapter. Using material from Enda Mariyam, this includes a description of the levelling down in wealth that has occurred between households in the village. One aspect of this levelling down is that a small number of households are no longer able to acquire very large amounts of wealth as they once did. The chapter considers how land reform has set new kinds of limits on wealth accumulation by shifting the basis for expanding control over land.

As wealth accumulation has been truncated, so there has been the disappearance of "big men" who acted as focal points in the local economy. The second part of the chapter explores some of the implications of the disappearance of big men. These include the decline in importance of vertical, dyadic relationships of dependence between big men and poor farmers. Such relationships once constituted a key context within which grain, oxen and labour resources were exchanged. The chapter considers how, in contrast, households now seek access to these resources across more diffuse and wide-ranging sets of social contacts.

Further, the chapter will argue that - concomitant with the disappearance of big men - there has been a shift in one of the key goals of social action. In particular, the chapter will show how the notion of *kibri* - or status-honour - has undergone a fragmentation of meaning. Whereas Bauer (1973: 87) asserts that obtaining more *kibri* was the primary goal toward which "all Tigray with ambition worked", in Enda Mariyam this is no longer the case. As one informant observed, "Today, *kibri* is useless."

Throughout, informant recollections of the period prior to the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie are used to sketch a picture of the past. Given the lack of research on rural social life during this period, the only option for obtaining information about how particular institutions or practices operated was to simply ask informants to describe them. Descriptions were collected from persons with adult memories of the Emperor.

Considering the problematic nature of oral testimonies about the past, however, these have been treated with caution. One of the challenges in comparing pre- and post-revolutionary rural society in Tigray is the extent to which the inequities and hardships of the past are evoked by political leaders as a means of emphasising the achievements of the present. Hence, many people provide, on first account, a "politically correct" and fairly superficial description of what the past looked like, and it is only upon further questioning about specific social arrangements that a hint of the day-to-day realities prior to the revolution emerges.

In addition, individual constructions of the past are coloured by individual experience. For example, informants who lost land after the reform tend to paint a rosier picture of "the past" than those who gained land. These considerations were taken into account, and information about social arrangements cross-checked across a variety of informants. While it is not possible to claim accuracy for informant recollections, they nevertheless allow one to conceptualise the main features of social organisation, including the dynamics of social stratification, during the *ancien regime*.

As well as oral testimonies, the chapter relies heavily on the work of Bauer (1973, 1975, 1977), whose study of Hareyna is used, albeit cautiously, as a kind of pre-revolutionary "baseline" for comparison. The work of Hoben (1970, 1973, 1975) among the Amhara is also important in this regard.

2. Levelling Effects of Land Reform

2.1 A Picture of the Past: Wealth Differences and the Position of Big Men

This section provides a brief overview of wealth differentiation in Enda Mariyam prior to the downfall of Emperor Haile Selassie. In general, when adult informants recall this period, they sketch a picture that includes a small minority of very wealthy households and a larger majority of relatively poor households. Indeed, one of the striking things about informant descriptions of the past is the size of the gap that existed between rich and poor as compared with the present-day. A key element mentioned in relation to wealth differences is inequality in size of landholdings:

In the past, there were a few rich people. Most people were poor (Haleka Wolde Michael Kasai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

The poor had only one *tsimdi* or less. Most poor people had *mebaro*⁵⁸ land, but if they had other land that could be ploughed, it is not more than one *tsimdi*. The *mebaro* land was high up in the mountain. They ploughed this by hand. Other than this, the poor didn't have land. Most were working for the rich (Gebre Medin Selassie, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

The poor had small land, less than one *tsimdi*. If they had minimum one *tsimdi* they ploughed by renting oxen from the rich. But if they had less they ploughed by hand. But this land was not enough for them and their families, so they also worked for the rich (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

During the late imperial period, the richest man in Enda Mariyam was Geta Seifu Gebre Michael, who was also the parish headman or *chika shum*.⁵⁹ Geta Seifu owned six teams of oxen and had large *risti* holdings both in Enda Mariyam and in neighbouring villages, on the order of approximately 12 hectares.

⁵⁸ *Mebaro* refers to turning the soil by hand with a hoe. "*Mebaro* land" as used here refers to land that cannot be ploughed with oxen, due to its size, rockiness, or slope.

⁵⁹ *Chika shum* was the lowest level of administration in the imperial polity vested with authority in law. Other positions, such as that of village manager, were not legally recognised offices, but still conferred authority in a village context (see Bauer 1973: 100).

In addition to his own holding, Geta Seifu rented in plots of good quality soil from the Mariyam monastery, which administered roughly half the arable land in the village, under a *gwilti* grant from Emperor Yohanis IV. *Gwilti* typically conferred rights to the income from land included in the grant. However, every *gwilti* grant was unique (see Bruce, 1976). In this case, the grant appears to have alienated large sections of *risti* estates in Enda Mariyam and Mai Woini *kushets*, and placed their use under the direct control of the monastery. Geta Seifu maintained cordial relations with the monastery through gifts of butter, honey, and small livestock, which also enabled him to rent the same plots from the monastery each year. At the same time, Geta Seifu rented out plots of poorer quality soil to other farmers in the village.

As well as being *chika shum*, Geta Seifu was also a *mesfint*, or "lord", by virtue of his father having been a titled nobleman. *Mesfint* typically held quasi-military titles, conferred by provincial governors or the Emperor. Such titles derived from positions in the military hierarchy prior to modernisation of the armed forces. Titles were distinct from office (*sumat*), although many office-holders also held titles. Because he was called *mesfint*, Geta Seifu did not physically plough the land himself, but contracted farmers to plough for him, in exchange for fixed payments. He had between four and five farmers working for him virtually full-time each agricultural season, from May to December. According to informants, such labour arrangements were paid in grain by agreement for a fixed amount or for a percentage of harvest.

Geta Seifu's wealth was primarily in the form of grain, although he also owned small livestock such as sheep, as well as cows. The fact that he was "grain rich" meant his household was able to host elaborate feasts on both secular and religious occasions, and to observe many more such occasions than other households in the village. He hosted, for example, large feasts known as *teskars*, including the feast of Gebre Selam held each year just after Easter. Normally, *teskars* are held in honour of a deceased relative. The soul of the deceased is assisted to heaven by inviting the poor to eat and drink liberally, thereby mitigating the bad deeds the deceased may have done on earth. A celebration of Gebre Selam - a symbolic *teskar* for Christ - is very expensive, since everyone, including the poor and the local clergy, should be fed. According to informants, only the richest men can afford to host a Gebre Selam. Today, only a very small number of households in the village do so, and the feasts they hold are much smaller in size.

For most of his neighbours, Geta Seifu's feasts constituted the only time in the year when they ate meat. His wealth in grain also meant that Geta Seifu was a major source of loans in the village, and many poor farmers relied on his loans to meet the requirements of their own households.

In exchange, Geta Seifu's debtors provided him with various kinds of labour, as well as displays of deference. Not only did his debtors provide him with service and deference; everyone in the village acknowledged his wealth and status. During weeding season, for example, village people would gather on his plots to work, even at the expense of their own land. In a social gathering, places would be adjusted so that Geta Seifu always had the best seat in the house, preferably one that placed him physically higher than others, and he would always be served coffee first. When entering a dwelling, a voluntary shuffling of position by other people ensured Geta Seifu always entered a room first. When greeting him, people would bow to indicate their respect.

Geta Seifu was considered an *abi seb*, or "big man", in Enda Mariyam. Indeed, he was ranked by a number of different informants as having been the "biggest" man in the village. The various components of "bigness" and the nature of social ranking are discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Here, it is important to note that Geta Seifu's bigness derived in part from his status as a *mesfint*, and in part from his position as *chika shum*, which rendered him *azazi* or one who has the authority to command the obedience of others.

However, other big men in Enda Mariyam possessed neither of these particular attributes. Rather, the attribute that Geta Seifu possessed in common with most other big men in the village was his considerable wealth. This wealth enabled him to host large feasts, to dispense loans of grain, and to attract a significant amount of the labour of poorer farmers in the village to his own farm. Indeed, the only big men who did not possess wealth were those deemed "big" by virtue of their ecclesiastical position, such as the headman of the Mariyam monastery.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ At the same time, having an ecclesiastical title did not by itself confer "bigness". Such a title should be accompanied by some other quality such as piousness or learning. Although monks have more honour than priests by virtue of their position as *menani* (being "out of the world"),

Prior to land reform, big men such as Geta Seifu were at the top of the village social hierarchy. In political terms, big men typically commanded networks of loyal supporters who could be called upon to help forward their ambitions to land, office, and/or noble titles, and who received various kinds of local political patronage in return. In social terms, big men possessed large amounts of *kibri*, or status-honour, that was publicly acknowledged through prestations of deference and respect. In economic terms - our main concern for the present - big men were the focal points of an exchange system that mediated seasonal access to key agricultural inputs, including oxen and grain. Further, within the *got*, big men acted as an important source of food, and especially meat, for other households.

When describing the past, informants were fairly consistent in naming the big men from their own *got*, but less consistent in naming those who were resident in other *gots*. Taken together, approximately 20 persons - excluding those with ecclesiastical title - were named by informants as having been *abi seb* in the village during the late imperial period. Aside from attributes that applied specifically to clerics (such as piety and morality), the most important attributes that qualified a man as having been "big" were wealth and generosity, in the sense of dispensing wealth through gifts and loans of food and grain.

One such *abi seb* - Haleka Tsgai Abraha - described in some detail the components of his "bigness", and how he dispersed his grain wealth in the form of loans to the poor:

I was a big man in the past. Also, Geta Seifu, Kasa Seyoum, and Haleka Giday were big from this neighborhood. All others were small. I was big by my writing, and because I can speak well. Also, I gave loans to the whole village. I gave to the very poor, and to those who paid me back. I gave grain, sometimes 1 *gebeta*, sometimes 2 *gebeta*. I gave totally about 2 *sherfa*⁶¹ each year, bit by bit, to different people. I gave these loans, and still I could feed my family. Not only my family, even my relatives came and I fed them here with

many informants had disparaging things to say about monks who transgressed this status, or were unduly greedy.

⁶¹ A large basket used for grain storage, of around 5 *abet* of grain, or a total of approximately 288 kilograms (See Appendix 4). A very large *sherfa* may hold up to 350 kilograms of grain.

me... By the Bible it says if you have the ability to give, you have to give loans to poor people. There were some rich men who didn't give loans, and we called them bad. We said "they are greedy and only think of themselves." The big man in the past is one who helped the poor people by feeding them (Haleka Tsgai Abraha, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

In a related vein, Bauer (1973: 110) describes what he calls the "uneven density" in the pattern of reciprocity of neighbourhood relationships in Hareyna as a consequence of big men. Although he is addressing a slightly different issue - namely, the distinction between normative and actual neighbourhood relationships - he provides a vivid sense of how big men acted as focal points of exchange in a neighbourhood setting:

Contrary to what one would expect from the rules, the network of neighborhood relations is of quite uneven density, and from a transactional point of view, the flow of goods and services between neighbors is asymmetrical. The existence of big men is responsible for both the uneven density and the asymmetry... The list of helpers who came to Gebre-absesay's daughter's wedding as neighbors includes people from 19 households. Gebre-absesay is a very big man. When Tesfay: Setehin, who is the head of an economically viable household of small pretensions, had a wedding for his daughter, the people who came to help were from only three neighboring households... The neighbors of a big man act as his helpers, giving their time and labor but he feeds them, providing beer and feast food (notably meat). There is therefore a net flow of labor into the big man's household and a net flow of food out. The transaction is an agreeable one, since poor households tend to be labor rich, and rich households, capital rich.

To illustrate his point, Bauer (1973: 112) provides a schematic representation of a specific neighbourhood, wherein households are indicated by circles, and neighborhood relations are indicated by lines. Both normative and actual neighbourhood relations are shown, by single and broken lines, respectively. What is striking about the diagram is the central position of two households in the neighborhood headed by big men. Radiating out from each of these households, like spokes from a wheel, are broken lines leading to other households in the neighbourhood.

At the other end of the wealth spectrum from Geta Seifu and Haleka Tsgai was Araya Haloof. During the last days of the Emperor, Araya was one of the poorest farmers in Enda Mariyam. He owned no oxen, and his landholding was only one *tsimdi*, or approximately one-quarter hectare. In order to cultivate this land, Araya borrowed

oxen for a small number of days each year from the richest man in his neighbourhood, Tekle Himinut Yohanis, who owned three teams of oxen. Araya paid for these oxen loans with labour, working two days on Tekle Himinut Yohanis's land for every day he borrowed the oxen.

The small amount of grain Araya harvested each year was wholly inadequate to meet his household's requirements, however, and he relied heavily on loans from one season to the next. His main creditor was Tekle Himinut Yohanis, to whom his household remained in a chronic state of what Bauer (1973: 131) has called "debt dependence":

...a household which has failed as a farming enterprise must depend upon a rich household for gifts and loans of food as well as for the loan of oxen if it is to farm at all. Fifty-seven per cent of the households in Hareyna are in a debt-dependent relationship to the richest eight per cent of the households.

In exchange for the provision of grain and food from Tekle Himinut Yohanis, Araya performed various kinds of agricultural work on Tekle Himinut Yohanis's land, including ploughing, weeding, and cutting. He also assisted Tekle Himinut Yohanis with various non-agricultural tasks whenever required, such as mending the fences in his compound. Indeed, much of Araya's labour was directed toward supporting the farm economy of Tekle Himinut Yohanis's household, rather than his own. In addition, Araya's wife would frequently help Tekle Himinut Yohanis's wife in domestic tasks such as fetching water and especially grinding grain, the most time- and energy-consuming of tasks.

Although he was heavily debt-dependent and his labour was tied primarily to Tekle Himinut Yohanis's farm, Araya benefited from Tekle Himinut Yohanis's support in various ways. Tekle Himinut Yohanis's wife sometimes called Araya and his family to eat together with them, for example, which constituted virtually the only times in the year when they ate meat. In addition, Tekle Himinut Yohanis sponsored the wedding of Araya's eldest daughter by covering the costs associated with the ceremony. Such acts of patronage on the part of Tekle Himinut Yohanis not only helped Araya meet his household's needs, they also contributed to the status and honour of Tekle Himinut Yohanis. In social gatherings, Araya would always rise and give his seat to Tekle Himinut Yohanis, or to any other big man who happened to be present. Indeed,

Araya would often find himself standing during a social gathering, and he was often served coffee last if at all.

Not all poor farmers were in as dependent position as Araya Haloof. In between the richest and poorest ends of the wealth spectrum were those who managed essentially on their own, neither dispensing support nor receiving it. As one informant noted, "Not all people were rich or poor. There were also people in the middle; they took care of themselves." Nevertheless, informant descriptions of the past indicate a significant polarisation of wealth as compared to the present-day, wherein a small number of big men commanded the majority of land, oxen and grain resources. Because of this concentration of resources there were few farmers who could maintain economically viable households wholly outside the context of personalised relations of dependence on richer households. Before considering how these relationships have changed, it is important to first examine changes in wealth differentiation since land reform.

2.2 Closing the Gap Between Rich and Poor

The descriptions above give a sense of the size of the gap that existed between rich and poor in Enda Mariyam during the late imperial period. If we compare this situation with the present day, it is clear that this gap in wealth has narrowed considerably.

For example, it is no longer possible to find anyone in the village who commands wealth on a scale commensurate with the big men of the past such as Geta Seifu and Haleka Tsgai. Even allowing for an exaggeration of his own generosity, Haleka Tsgai's claim of having been able to feed his own family and any relatives who depended on him, as well as loaning two *sherfa*'s worth of grain each year, is an indicator of the extent of his previous wealth. By comparison, the richest households in Enda Mariyam today have difficulty obtaining the estimated 10 quintals of grain needed to meet their most basic food and seed requirements.⁶²

⁶² Estimate taken from a Save the Children study (1993) for an "average" household of 4.2 persons, commensurate with the "average" household of 4.27 persons in Enda Mariyam.

The extent to which the gap between rich and poor has narrowed can be seen in the distribution of oxen. As shown in the previous chapter, oxen are a critical factor influencing household wealth, because they determine whether a household can make actual use of *de jure* rights in land. Hence, to understand how wealth differences have changed since land reform, it is important to examine changes in the pattern of oxen ownership.

When informants were asked to compare past and present, they described a levelling down in livestock ownership among the rich together with a levelling *up* among the majority of poorer households:

Today's rich are not the same as the rich in the past. Now the land is distributed to all, rich, poor, women, blacksmiths... Now, those who had two or three *tsimdi* (team of oxen) have only one ox. But some people also improved their situation. When we evaluate it, we can say that everyone has gone down, but everyone also has one ox now (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

Before, the rich man had a lot of land and he could keep six oxen. Now, even three oxen are difficult to keep, because we lack the land. Before, animals were only in the households of the rich. But now, most people have animals (Gerencha'al Wolde Mariyam, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

As these comments show, a levelling out in oxen ownership was specifically attributed by village informants to the redistribution of holdings after land reform. In this regard, it is important to distinguish between an aggregate reduction in livestock numbers as a consequence of drought, and a more systemic change in distribution pattern as a consequence of a new tenure regime. While it is clear that livestock and especially oxen numbers declined dramatically following the drought cycles of the early and mid-1980s and early 1990s, the concern here is with long-term changes in the pattern of oxen ownership, rather than temporary changes in herd size.

Informant observations that there has been a levelling up in livestock ownership appears at odds with the idea that land reform did not have much effect on the distribution of agricultural capital because it did not involve an actual redistribution of oxen resources. This is the view taken by Rahmato (1984), for example, in his study of the impact of agrarian reform under the Derg.

Rahmato focuses on the effect of land reform on the size of peasant holdings and related changes in rural class configuration. In so doing, he emphasises control over land as the key factor in the agrarian political economy. The link between area cultivated, oxen ownership and wealth outlined in the previous chapter does not figure prominently in Rahmato's work, perhaps because he compares different regions of Ethiopia not all of which are characterised by the ox-plough cropping system of the north. His assertion, for example, that "redistribution... has been almost exclusively restricted to farm land, and other resources were hardly involved" (Rahmato, 1984: 52) does not appear relevant for Tigray. Informants in Enda Mariyam, for example, suggest that the configuration of livestock ownership between households is different now as compared to the late imperial period.

Unfortunately, survey figures that would allow for a more systematic comparison of capital ownership before and after land reform are extremely difficult to obtain. This is mainly due to the lack of data for the pre-revolutionary period. Studies prior to 1974 indicating capital distribution among rural households are less common than studies attempting to quantify peasant landholdings. Even where capital distribution is measured, figures are rarely disaggregated for individual districts or regions.

As a rough indicator, however, it is possible to compare data on oxen ownership in Harenya in the late 1960s as recorded by Bauer (1973: 166), and data on oxen ownership in Enda Mariyam in the mid-1990s. This comparison has the advantage of using data recorded for a specific village setting, having been obtained through both questionnaire and direct observation methods. The two villages are also roughly equivalent in size,⁶³ and both are located in *dega* - that is, highland - settings. The comparison is shown in Table 11 below.⁶⁴

⁶³ In 1969, Hareyna had 253 households. As of 1993, Enda Mariyam had 228 households.

⁶⁴ Figures for Hareyna are based on Bauer (1973: 166). Figures for Enda Mariyam are based on a household survey (see Appendix 8).

| TABLE 11: Comparison of oxen distribution between households, Hareyna and Enda Mariyam | | |
|---|----------------|---------------------|
| | Hareyna (1969) | Enda Mariyam (1993) |
| Own 0 ox | 39.0 % | 32.0 % |
| Own 1 ox | 9.0 % | 44.5 % |
| Own 2 oxen | 31.0 % | 21.9 % |
| Own 3 oxen | 8.0 % | 1.6 % |
| Own > 3 oxen | 13.0 % | 0.0 % |

Table 11 provides apparent confirmation for informant descriptions of a levelling up in oxen ownership. As the table shows, there was a significant gap between oxenless and oxen-owning households in Hareyna in the early 1960s. In Enda Mariyam in the early 1990s, however, there has been a significant rise in the number of single-ox or "middle" wealth households.

Further, there has been a reduction in the average size of herds. Whereas in Hareyna a significant number of households were clustered at the upper end of the livestock-wealth spectrum - including ten households that owned three or more *teams* of oxen - in Enda Mariyam this is no longer the case. The upper end of the livestock-wealth spectrum has contracted downward, and there were only two surveyed households in the village that owned more than a single team of oxen during the period of fieldwork. Indeed, as was evident from wealth-ranking exercises, owning two oxen in the present day invariably locates a household in the "richest" wealth category.

Thus, if we take Table 11 as an indicator of what has occurred, it can be said that while there are fewer households that own a large number of oxen, there are nevertheless more oxen-owning households overall.

In light of the aim of achieving greater equity, it is not surprising that the biggest "losers" in the land reform process were those individuals with large *risti* holdings. Geta Seifu, for example, saw his 12 hectares reduced to slightly more than a single hectare. The down-sizing of the large landholder helps explain the levelling down in capital ownership shown in Table 11. It is simply not possible to support a large

number of oxen on a reduced land base. In tandem with the reduction of his holding, Geta Seifu's herd gradually shrunk from twelve oxen to the single ox he owns at present. In addition, the largest institutional holding, that of the Mariyam monastery, was divided amongst the total of individual claimants in the village, with monks receiving shares of land in the same manner as laypersons.

While large landholders in the village lost after land reform, many poor smallholders gained.⁶⁵ Araya Haloof saw his holding increase from approximately one-quarter hectare to slightly less than one hectare. More significantly, the *quality* of Araya's land has improved; he now has some plots of good quality land close to his homestead. The fact that farmers such as Araya saw an improvement in the quantity and quality of their land means, at least in theory, an improved potential for them to keep livestock, including oxen. Table 11 suggests that there has indeed been an upward movement of households into oxen ownership.

The narrowing of the gap between rich and poor since land reform should not only be seen as a result of the equalisation of landholdings, however. This is because the reform process had more profound implications than simply the redistribution of plots. Of equal importance is the fact that land reform fundamentally altered the basis upon which control over land is determined. In this regard, the levelling down in wealth that has occurred since land reform is also a function of the operating principles of the tenure system itself.

In effect, the post-revolutionary tenure system has made it impossible to accumulate oxen and wealth on a scale commensurate with the past, because it has disabled the mechanisms that once allowed ambitious men to significantly expand their control over land.⁶⁶ The next section considers how these mechanisms operated.

⁶⁵ Rahmato (1984) found a similar levelling effect in four areas of Ethiopia after the Derg's land reform. He notes that a majority of households retained holdings of a size more or less equivalent with what they held before the reform, with a levelling down and levelling up at either end of the landholding spectrum.

⁶⁶ Mechanisms for expanding control over land under *risti* pertain almost exclusively to men. Hence, the male pronoun is used throughout. Women's rights in *risti* land are discussed in the next chapter.

2.3 Power, Wealth and Land in the Imperial Period

It has often been assumed that the *risti* tenure system of the late imperial period was "feudal" insofar as it created relatively fixed social strata in which individuals could not significantly alter their social position. Hoben (1973: 8) wrote in the early 1970s, for example, that, " ... many foreign observers and an increasing number of educated, urban Ethiopians have come to call the land-tenure system feudal, and have cast it somewhat uncritically in an image thought appropriate to other feudal, agrarian societies." This view of *risti* still tends to predominate and has been perpetuated by the lack of ethnographic studies of northern farm economies.

The relatively fixed social strata of the *ancien regime* were seen to be closely linked to control over land. As Hoben (1973: 8) notes, differences between major classes in society did broadly correspond to differences in types of land rights potentially available to their members. Further, since access to land under *risti* was based on hereditary rights, it was assumed that an individual's social position was largely determined by the amount of land they inherited.

However, while it is true that social status and control over land were intimately connected under *risti*, the amount of land that an individual actually controlled was not delimited by what they inherited. Rather, it was subject to change - in some cases dramatically - over time. During his work among the Gojjam Amhara, for example, Hoben (1973) found significant differences in social status between fathers and sons, and between brothers who had inherited equal shares of land. The reason for this is that under *risti* control over land was less a function of the mechanics of hereditary principles *per se* than of the ability of an individual to work those principles to their own advantage. In other words, control over land was largely a function of power:

While power and status are certainly related to control over land, it is inaccurate to say they are based on it. It would be at least as true to say that control over land is based on power, for, as will be seen, individuals who increase their political power are able to increase their holding of "hereditary" land (Hoben, 1973: 9).

That control over land was largely a function of power had to do with the nature of

hereditary rights under *risti*.⁶⁷ A person possessing *risti* did not hold rights to a specific plot of land but rather to an unspecified share of the total estate settled by an ancestor from whom he or she was descended. Since descent was reckoned through either male or female lines, an individual's theoretical *risti* rights were always much larger than could actually be realised. It was this that rendered *risti* a dynamic system, because it allowed for contests between individuals over overlapping rights in land. Major winners and losers in such contests not only saw their land area change dramatically, they also saw changes in their economic and social status as a result.

A key place where major contests over land were enacted was in court. For those individuals who possessed the necessary material and political resources, advancing a descent claim to new land through the courts was a common strategy. Indeed, according to Bauer (1975), contesting descent claims in court was the most important way that large redistributions of land occurred under *risti*. Since, as Bauer (1975: 244) observes, there were no written records to produce in the court, and since both parties were likely to have equally valid *de jure* rights in the same land, "the deciding factor in most cases (was) power."

Power in the context of court fights over land derives from the reputations and connections of the claimants, and from the liquid resources they have available for carrying on the case. Fighting a case in court is expensive. Witnesses must be transported to and from court... Clerks may require a "fee"... It may seem appropriate to do a favor for the judge. In part because there are no clear criteria for judging a case, cases tend to go on indefinitely until one side runs out of resources and allows the case to be judged against them or the case is settled out of court (Bauer, 1975: 244).

The loser in major court cases not only lost the land in question but also their reputation as a good court fighter, making it harder for them to advance a new case in the future. Conversely, the winner not only increased their control over land but also enhanced their reputation as a successful litigant. With an enhanced reputation as a good court fighter, it was easier to obtain additional land out of court. The threat of a court case was often enough to produce a voluntary handing over of some share of

⁶⁷ This study can only provide a cursory overview of how *risti* operated. For the definitive study of *rist* (the Amharic word for the same tenure system in areas to the immediate south of Tigray), see Hoben (1973). Bruce (1976) also provides some material on *risti* in Tigray, as well as the secondary but related tenure system of *chiguraf gwoses*.

disputed land by weaker individuals, in order to avoid a costly court case. In this way, a person who was acknowledged as having the resources to successfully advance a descent claim in court could use this reputation to increase the area of land they cultivated without having to engage in new litigation:

A person who was strong⁶⁸ and could speak well in a court could have *risti* land. Even if you knew it was your land, they would come and say, "This is my land", and because of your weakness, because you can't speak well in court, the strong one would take your land (Mebratu Kidan, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

Indeed, Bauer cites the case of a man who, in the five years after winning a major court case, was able to increase the area he plowed from 80 acres to 900 acres in this way (Bauer, 1975: 244).⁶⁹

Litigation was not the only option available to ambitious men for expanding control over land. Both Bauer (1975) and Hoben (1973) cite the manipulation of rental transactions as an important means whereby influential men acquired additional *de facto*, if not *de jure*, rights in land. According to Bauer (1975: 243), capital-poor households who rented out their land were vulnerable to situations in which capital-rich tenants simply asserted ownership of the land they tilled:

Some unscrupulous tenants find it convenient to forget that the land was rented to them and assert that they hold it through some other claim. In land-share villages they may claim it was part of their allotment from the village.⁷⁰ In *risti* villages they may claim that they hold it through inheritance or descent claims. In either case the original landholder, who would not be renting out his land if he had any capital, is unlikely to be able to defend himself against his richer adversary.

⁶⁸ The Tigrinya word *hayli*, translated here as "strong", also means "force" or "power". Bauer translates *hayli* exclusively as "power" in his 1973 study. I have chosen to use the alternative translation for this quote, because it provides a more vivid sense of what the speaker intended.

⁶⁹ Bauer's land estimates appear grossly exaggerated. I suspect he mistakenly equated an acre with a *tsimdi*, in which case the man in question would have expanded his farmland from 9 to 100 hectares, a more realistic, though still remarkable, estimate.

⁷⁰ The reference to "land share" used by Bauer denotes the *chiguraf gwoses* system of land tenure, mentioned in Chapter 2. Rights in land under *chiguraf gwoses* were based on residence rather than descent, although a person's living in a village with this kind of tenure system did not preclude them holding *risti* land in another village. According to Bruce (1976), *chiguraf gwoses* was an adaptation of *risti* to population growth; by adopting *chiguraf gwoses* a village could regulate the number of its residents. Bruce (1976) suggests that villages in Tigray sometimes switched back and forth between the two systems to adjust population size.

Informants in Enda Mariyam say that this sort of land "take over" in the context of rental transactions was relatively common during the late imperial period. The practice, known as *mahares b'hayli* or "ploughing by force", was outlawed by the TPLF. In addition to *mahares b'hayli*, informants say there were also cases where a person known as a court fighter would claim a particular plot of land, and, in order not to lose access to the plot, the original holder would offer to become a tenant on his own land:

Sometimes the poor also rented land from the rich. A rich one would come to the poor one and say, "This is my land." The land belongs to the poor one, but he knows he can't win in court over the rich. So he would say, "Yes, this is your land. But rent it to me and I will give you a share of the harvest" (Mebratu Kidan, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

As these examples suggest, the power to gain control over additional land in the late imperial period derived from a combination of attributes. First, an individual needed sufficient liquid resources to influence the outcome of contests over land in their favour, as well as the capital resources necessary to convert acquired land into wealth through agricultural production. In addition, an individual needed sufficient political influence to garner supporters who would attest to the validity of their claim over the claim of others. Political influence, in turn, derived from a number of sources, most notably the holding of political office. In Enda Mariyam, the fact that Geta Seifu was *chika shum* enabled him to mobilise large numbers of supporters who would testify to the validity of his claims to land in court. As one informant noted, "He was always making court cases for land."

Aside from office-holders whose authority was codified in law, politically influential men were also those who could "get people to do things" (Bauer, 1973: 75). In some cases, this meant simply having the talent to organise other people to act - a not insignificant achievement in a society characterised by a low level of individual commitment to group undertakings (see Hoben, 1970). In most cases, however, the ability to "get people to do things" was a function of wealth. As an individual's wealth increased, so did their ability to act as creditor to a number of poorer dependants:

Informants say that there is no rule that debt-dependents must do what their creditors say, but that only a fool would not. A disobedient debt-dependent will be asked to sign for his next loan, giving the creditor the sanction of suit in court for non-payment (Bauer 1973: 86).⁷¹

One farmer in Enda Mariyam put the matter more forcefully:

In the past, the rich gave the poor a loan, and the poor has to work for him. In the past, the poor man was under the control of the rich. If he says stand, the poor has to stand. If he says sleep, the poor has to sleep (Gebre Kidan Tekie, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

In general, poorer farmers found it difficult to protect the land they held as *risti* from the claims of wealthier and more powerful men. Such claims might involve the actual transfer of *risti* rights, or the seasonal transfer of cultivation rights in the context of rental agreements. In either case, for those with the capacity to successfully press home their claims to land, *risti* created real possibilities for upward mobility. Hoben (1973: 182) cites evidence for this upward mobility in Amhara areas of Gojjam, showing that a high proportion of plots held by large landholders were acquired by means other than inheritance. The most important of these was the successful pursuit of court cases. For Hoben (1973: 230), *risti* was "a way of allocating people to available land in accordance with their social and political prominence."

Because control over land was largely a function of power, *risti* provided a myriad of opportunities for individuals with sufficient political influence to accumulate large amounts of wealth. As one informant put it, "In the past, it was easy to become rich." The fact that power mediated access to land also lent the system a vertical dynamism in terms of individual movement upwards and downwards in wealth. As Bauer (1973: 136) records, the wealth of many men in Hareyna fluctuated, in some cases dramatically, over time:

⁷¹ Interestingly, although Bauer's informants insisted that anyone with wealth could have power, there were also some people who did not seek it. As Bauer (1973: 76) notes, "When I asked about the power of one wealthy individual I was told that 'he has money but he does not use it. He does not want power. When he lends money he does it at night without telling anyone about it' ... Everyone spoke of him as a nice, but odd person, for not having converted more of his wealth into power."

... the precariousness of a household's position and the real possibility of upward movement, through careful manipulation and luck, provide a relatively high degree of social mobility. A household may be in debt at one point, emerge to have its own debt-dependents, and later fall into debt again. The most spectacular example of upward mobility is that of Tesfay Weldeca-al ... who came to Hareyna as a wood gatherer and now has 15 debt-dependents. Downward mobility is equally spectacular.

Although wealth accumulation was not necessarily the key objective of ambitious men prior to land reform, it was in most cases a prerequisite for pursuing other goals. What these other goals constituted is considered later. Here, the discussion moves on to examine how the dynamics of the tenure system have changed since the revolution.

2.4 Disaggregating Land and Power After Reform

During the imperial period, economic and political aspects of land were not strongly differentiated. Expanding control over land depended less on an individual's economic or productive behaviour than on their capacity to be winners in contests over land. Such winners almost always commanded enough wealth to mobilise supporters. With wealth and land, in turn, an individual could increase their political prominence and possibly acquire formal authority through political office. In other words, "there was relatively little separation between political power, the control of land, and wealth" (Hoben, 1973: 209).

The land tenure system introduced by the TPLF represents a significant departure from this scenario. Rather than allocating people to land in accordance with their social and political prominence, the present tenure regime serves to allocate land to people on the basis of household size. In other words, the present tenure system has seen power replaced by demography as the most important allocatory mechanism.

With power replaced by demography as the means of distribution, land resources have been effectively removed from the realm of political competition. Whereas Hoben could assert that "land has been as much a political as an economic

commodity", such an assertion is no longer valid.⁷² In Enda Mariyam, for example, those individuals who hold local political office cannot use it to gain control of additional land; indeed, there were no strategies in evidence during fieldwork for converting political authority into economic advantage. Rather, members of the *mikre bet* frequently complained that their productive capacity was undermined by the amount of time required to fulfill their administrative responsibilities. Conversely, those individuals who possess the most wealth cannot necessarily translate this wealth into political power. None of the members of the *mikre bet* were ranked as "rich" by informants during fieldwork; on the contrary, the majority were ranked as "poor".

In effect, land reform severed the organic link between political and economic aspects of land tenure that existed under *risti*. It is no longer possible to employ political strategies as a means of expanding control over land. It is this aspect of land reform that helps account for the levelling down in wealth between households described earlier in the chapter. By establishing a tenure regime in which control over land is distinct from power, land reform eliminated the myriad of opportunities available to politically influential men for accumulating wealth. Whereas previously a household head could expand their landholding through the astute management of political relationships, a household head in the present day can only increase their landholding when there has been an increase in the size of their household. Further, whereas under *risti* the amount of land a single individual could amass was theoretically unlimited,⁷³ at present landholdings are only increased by small increments and there is a ceiling on the additional land a household will receive for demographic expansion.

⁷² Although I have quoted him in this way to illustrate a point, Hoben himself drew a distinction between the traditional operation of *rist* (Amharic) and the pressures on the system due to Haile Selassie's modernising reforms. In light of these reforms, and especially the change from tribute and tax collection to cash salaries for office-holders, Hoben (1973: 209) notes that, "Land, power and wealth... are becoming increasingly distinct."

⁷³ In practice, various factors prevented individuals from expanding control over land indefinitely under *risti*. First was the difficulty of covering a large land area in the short time periods for ploughing and planting. However, large landholders somewhat mitigated this problem by renting out land. More significant was the ceiling imposed on an individual's ambitions to acquire land by other landholders. As Hoben (1973: 185) explains, "After initial successes in obtaining additional land from a descent corporation, a man will find his claims opposed by an increasingly united group of landholders who feel that he already has too much of the land."

Hence, whereas Hoben (1973: 231) described *rist* as "a fluid system of individual inequities", the present tenure regime provides for greater equity between households at the expense of this fluidity. Land resources no longer change hands with the same degree of dynamism as they did under *risti* because they no longer circulate in accordance with the circulation of political power. As a result, the dramatic increases or decreases in landholding that occurred during *risti* are no longer possible; instead, every adult is now confined more or less to their adult half *gibri* share. A corollary of this is that "the real possibility of upward movement" (Bauer, 1973: 136) that *risti* provided for some individuals has largely been lost. Instead, the movement of individuals upward or downward in wealth takes place within a more restricted range.

In the past, always people changed their status from year to year. For example, one year they might be rich, another year they might be poor. Now, there is no one who improves except a few (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

There are few people today who can change their position. A few people can change from poor to middle, but now it is difficult to become rich (Alem Techliwoini, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

In effect, the present tenure system has produced a structural limitation on how much wealth a household can accumulate through agricultural production because it has restricted the extent to which a household can expand its control over land. The only means of accumulating more wealth in the village context is to have some other source of income. For example, among the richest households in Enda Mariyam today are those headed by *haleka* (deacons) who produce handwritten bibles or other religious texts, which are then sold for cash.⁷⁴ Other households ranked as "rich" include those headed by men who own two oxen, and who are farming the maximum land area that their labour, seed supply, and oxen resources allow.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ It takes about one year to complete such a book, which may be sold for as much as 1,000 *birr*. Books are sold through informal networks of ecclesiastics such as monastery headman, learned monks or priests. According to one deacon in Enda Mariyam, these networks extend throughout Tigray and are linked by religious institutions of note in different districts. A study of this little-known "cottage industry" would prove interesting, especially in terms of how informal social networks operate efficiently as marketing and distribution mechanisms.

⁷⁵ As noted in Chapter 3, based on a farming survey of six case-study households in Enda Mariyam this appears to be a maximum of approximately 2 hectares in total (around 8 *tsimdi*), including both own holdings and land rented in. The main reason for this is limitations on oxen, seed, and labour resources available to households during the short intervals for farm work.

In this context, land rental appears as the single mechanism through which land resources circulate with any degree of dynamism in the present day. Aside from transfers of land associated with the creation of new households - considered in the next chapter - land rental functions as the primary means through which a household can adjust the area it cultivates to match the resources and labour at its disposal. However, land rental practices have themselves been affected by land reform. Changes in land rental practices provide a further indication of the extent to which political and economic aspects of land have become distinct, because they point to the development of a market for land.

2.5 Land Rental and the Development of a Land Market

During the late imperial period, the pattern of land rental was complex. Rich and poor were tenants and landlords, and in some cases both at the same time. To see how the pattern of rental transactions has changed, it is important to understand how they operated prior to land reform.

With approximately half the arable land in the village, the largest landlord in Enda Mariyam was the monastery. Aside from a small area of fertile land set aside for their own production,⁷⁶ the administrators of the monastery rented out the bulk of their holding. According to informants, it was usually the rich that could afford to rent the best quality plots from the monastery. Together with a share of the harvest as rent, the monastery expected to receive gifts from its tenants in the form of honey, butter, or small livestock. By providing valuable gifts, a tenant not only demonstrated their active patronage of the monastery, they also increased the likelihood of re-renting the same plots in subsequent seasons. As one informant explained:

Farmers gave gifts to the monks like honey or goats or bread to get the best quality land. If you kept a good relationship with them, you could keep the land for a long time. But if they were angry, they could take the land away and give it to someone else (Alem Techliwoini, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

⁷⁶ Since monks do no agricultural labour themselves, this land was cultivated by peasant farmers hired by the monastery for the growing season from approximately May to December.

Secular landlords comprised two main categories: large *risti* landholders such as Geta Seifu, and poor households that lacked the oxen and male labour necessary to cultivate their own holdings. In the case of large landholders, the main reason for renting out land had to do with the time constraints imposed by a short growing season, combined with constraints on agricultural labour imposed by the religious calendar of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Although a large landholder such as Geta Seifu could command significant labour from his dependants and supporters, these constraints meant there was an upper limit on the area he could manage to cultivate in any given year. In order to maximise the quality of the land farmed within this limit, large landholders often rented out some of their plots.

Tenants were from different wealth situations. As noted above, large landholders such as Geta Seifu rented in land as a means of juggling the quality of plots they farmed. At the same time, households that did not have large *risti* holdings, but that nevertheless owned oxen, became relatively wealthy by renting in land from both the monastery and secular landlords. Haleka Tsgai, for example, one of the big men mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, held a relatively modest amount of *risti* land. One reason for this was that Haleka Tsgai did not initiate any land disputes. As he explained, "I didn't like to start these arguments in court." Instead, Haleka Tsgai acquired the bulk of his grain wealth from crop production on rented land. Indeed, out of the 20 or so men listed as having been the wealthiest in the village prior to land reform, approximately one-third earned the bulk of their income on rented land.

Some oxenless households also appear to have rented in land and then re-rented it to those with oxen. This seems to have occurred mainly in the context of land rented from the monastery. As well as those rich farmers who could afford to provide valuable gifts, a poor farmer might also obtain land from the monastery without providing a gift as long as they had some other kind of relationship with the monks:

Mostly, it was richer farmers who could afford to rent good land from the monks. But some farmers who were not rich, if they had a special connection with the monks, or if they had a relative who was a monk, then they could also get land. They rented this land to those who had oxen (Haleka Wolde Michael Kasai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

Tenants of the monastery were exclusively men. This was due to prohibitions against women entering the monastery grounds or speaking directly to a monk. Consequently, women who sought to rent land from the monastery required an intermediary, usually a male relative who would negotiate on their behalf. Often, these intermediaries would themselves become tenants on the land in question. In this way, female-headed households could gain access to land from the monastery, as well as male labour for ploughing. The male tenant would pay a share of the crop as rent to the woman after the monastery's rent had been deducted from the total harvest.

In Enda Mariyam, most rental arrangements were one of two types. In the first, known as *siso*, the tenant paid the landholder one-third of the crop yield.⁷⁷ In the second, known as *ribuk mewgaya*, the tenant took an initial "gift" (*mewgaya*) of one-fourth of the yield, with the remainder divided equally with the landholder. These arrangements pertained to land of reasonably good quality, however. For land of poor quality, rent payments were lower, dropping to one-fourth or even one fifth of the harvest. In the case of the monastery's land, rental payments were normally one-fifth of the crop harvest. However, for those tenants who could provide valuable gifts to the monks, the monastery was a *laissez faire* landlord:

Renting from the monastery was in name only, because it was only one-fifth payment. Sometimes they even took less. Sometimes, if you gave them one *kefer*,⁷⁸ they didn't control you after that (Haleka Wolde Michael Kasai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

The cost of renting in land during the late imperial period can be compared with the present day. Whereas in the past, it was rare for rents to rise above one-third of the crop yield, it is rare today for them to be less than one-half. Further, whereas previously it was the tenant who often took an initial amount of grain as *mewgaya* (gift), today it has become standard practice for the landholder to take the *mewgaya*.

⁷⁷ Straw, however, went exclusively to the tenant. Although the share of crop harvest paid as rent has risen since land reform, there appears to have been no change in the practice of all straw (crop residue) being retained by the tenant as is the case today.

⁷⁸ Approximately 30 kilograms (see Appendix 4).

Also, a tenant's offer of a *mewgaya* to a landlord is frequently accompanied by the provision of a grain loan. In fact, in years following a good harvest, a tenant cannot hope to compete in the rental market of Enda Mariyam today without making such offers.

These changes in rental practices point to the development of a land market. This is also evident in the fact that, whereas in the past it was possible to "bribe" a landholder with a gift of honey, butter, or livestock, at present exchanges in the context of rental agreements are exclusively in the form of grain and/or cash:

During Haile Selassie's time, you could give *hambasha* (bread) or other things. The landowner couldn't ask for grain or cash. The change started when the land was redistributed, even to the poor. The rich wanted more land, so they asked the poor. The poor began to ask for this *mewgaya*. They started asking for a small amount, maybe 10 *birr*. But then, it became more expensive. Now, for two *tsimdi* of land you have to give 1 *abet* of grain as a loan, in addition to *mewgaya* (Gebre Kidan Tekie, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

In effect, land reform created a severe shortage of land among those with the resources to substantially expand their area of cultivation, which drove the price of rented plots upward. Also, because land reform effectively eliminated the large landholder who had previously rented out some plots, the only remaining households seeking to rent out land are the oxenless poor. Hence, whereas in the past it was relatively easy to find a landlord willing to rent out land for a nominal price - including, in some cases, the payment of a basket of grain or a gift of honey or butter - this is no longer the case. Now, the smaller pool of landlords comprising exclusively capital-poor households are able to command a higher price in grain or cash for their plots.

In this respect, land reform has not only affected the price of rented plots, it has also affected the pattern of rental transactions. Virtually all rental agreements now take place between a capital-poor landlord and a capital-rich tenant. As described in Chapter 3, the majority of capital-poor households in present-day Enda Mariyam are female-headed, while the majority of capital-rich households are male-headed. In other words, tenants and landlords, respectively, are now almost always the same "category" of household. Hence, the complex pattern of rental transactions that existed prior to land reform has virtually disappeared, to be replaced by a more uni-directional pattern:

In the past, all the poor and the rich rented out land. The poor rented out due to the problem of having no oxen; the rich rented out due to having too much land and not enough time to farm it all. But now, only the poor rent out their land, because they have no oxen or seed. There was also this situation in the past. But in the past there was also the other direction - the rich also rented out their land to the poor, because they had too much land and they couldn't farm it all by themselves (Haleka Wolde Michael Kasai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

What these changes mean is that land rental no longer operates on the basis of personal or political relationships. It is no longer possible to "bribe" a landholder with a gift in order to acquire rented land, mainly because the value of land has risen. In this regard, it is possible to say that land rental now operates on a more market-driven basis. This is evident not only in the higher cost of plots but also in the fact that costs fluctuate depending on the previous year's harvest. As noted in Chapter 3, following a poor harvest there is less demand to rent in land, as fewer farmers have the requisite seed to expand their area of cultivation. In response, the price that landholders ask for rented plots drops in such years. This is manifested in the form of landholders refraining from asking for a loan or a *mewgaya*, effectively bringing the price down (see also Chiari, 1996). Conversely, prices for rented plots rise following a good harvest, as demand to rent rises.

The fact that land rental now operates on a more market-driven basis means it no longer constitutes a way of accumulating large amounts of wealth. Whereas in the past a big man such as Haleka Tsgai could significantly expand his area of cultivation - and hence his wealth - through renting, this is no longer possible. As Haleka Tsgai himself observed:

In the past, everyone was renting land because it was cheap to rent at that time. You could even give a gift to the landowner and keep all the harvest. But now, land is expensive. Now it is difficult to become rich.

2.6 Implications of Levelling Down: The Disappearance of Big Men

That it is now "difficult to become rich" on a scale commensurate with the past has important consequences. Most notably, it means there are no longer a small number of big men commanding the majority of land, oxen and grain resources in the village,

and acting as focal points in the local economy. Prior to land reform, individuals such as Geta Seifu were at the apex of large, pyramidal networks of resource and service exchange, characterised by a downward flow of grain and food and an upward flow of labour. Other individuals who were not quite so "big" as Geta Seifu, but who nevertheless possessed wealth through the cultivation of a large land area, stood at the top of similar networks on a smaller scale.

However, when asked what was different today as compared to the past, one informant in Enda Mariyam responded: "The government changed and the big men all died." This comment is largely metaphorical. In fact, many of those who were big men in Enda Mariyam during the late imperial period are still alive. Rather, the comment points to the decline in wealth of these men, and the fact that no household today can accumulate wealth on a similar scale. Without the ability to accumulate significant wealth, it is not possible to be "big" in the same manner as in the past. In effect, it is their "bigness" that has died, not the men themselves.

The disappearance of the traditional big man has important implications, both in terms of the configuration of relationships of economic dependence and in terms of the goals toward which social actors with ambition strive. These implications are considered in the remaining section of the chapter.

3. Land Reform and Social Stratification

Thus far, the discussion concerning big men during the late imperial period has focused primarily on their wealth. This has been important in terms of examining changes in wealth differentiation and the limits of wealth accumulation since land reform. In order to explore some of the wider social implications of the disappearance of big men, however, it is necessary to consider the quality of "bigness" in more detail.

3.1 Social Ranking and Status-Honour

In his ethnography of Hareyna, Bauer (1973: 67) calls attention to two key aspects of social stratification in the village: behavioural displays of ranking in different social settings, and the importance of what he calls vertical, dyadic ties of inequality. To understand the way "bigness" operated in the past, it is necessary to briefly outline each of these.

In Hareyna, Bauer notes that with few exceptions social interactions were characterised by displays of deferential behaviour that served to maintain a certain order of ranking among individuals. He provides a vivid description of how this was done (Bauer, 1973: 49):

In all settings where ranking is not specifically prohibited by a normative rule of equality, ranking is displayed in one manner or another... In a gesture familiar to us, men motion one another through doorways. The highest ranking man or his guest goes through the door first, followed by others in order of decreasing status-honor. Once inside, men are seated, again by rank. The host (or his agent) motions the highest ranking to the highest ranking seat. The others seat themselves in a descending order. If a new person comes in later he must be seated in the appropriate spot for his rank. Men of about his own rank will stand up and offer him the seat they were in and move slightly down from it... Coffee is now served... The coffee is offered to the man in the highest seat. He defers to the host, who demures. This display goes on down the line becoming quieter as it goes until the coffee runs out. The ranking display of low status men should not interfere with the conversation of men much higher than themselves.

As a key contention of his study, Bauer argues that the criterion for the ranking individuals in Hareyna was the amount of *kibri* - or status-honour - that they possessed. The word *kibri*, which Bauer (1973) defines as status-honour, comes from the root *kibur*, meaning "expensive" or "dear" (Tuquabo Aressi, 1987: 58). Although Bauer's definition seems appropriate, I believe *kibri* can also be seen as synonymous with "bigness". In either case, the amount of a person's *kibri* established their place in the social hierarchy of the village, which in turn determined the relative amount of deference they would be shown in different social settings. Significantly, Bauer was able to obtain from his informants a ranking of the "top" 25 people in Hareyna, according to the amount of *kibri* they possessed. Although this list might change, as

people moved "up" or "down" in place, Bauer's informants were nevertheless consistent with one another in terms of the order of the ranking at that particular time. Further, they were consistent in terms of the criterion according to which rank was determined:

While the rank of the individual may be displayed in different ways in different settings the order of ranking individuals is always the same. They are always being ranked in terms of the same thing. They are being ranked in terms of the amount of *kibri* ("honor") they possess (Bauer, 1973: 47).

Kibri was largely an acquired attribute, deriving from the accomplishments or achieved position of an individual. The only qualities that conferred *kibri* over which an individual had no control were age and being the son of a titled nobleman. Otherwise, the amount of *kibri* an individual possessed was mainly a function of their own effort and ambition. Becoming a priest or monk increased a person's *kibri*, although the way clergy were ranked was somewhat distinct from secular ranking (see Bauer, 1973; Hoben, 1970). In most basic terms, *kibri* was obtained by establishing an independent household and by managing that household in such a way as to avoid dependence on others. Bauer (1973: 238) notes that virtually all persons who headed debt-dependent households in Hareyna were ranked lower than those who did not.

According to Bauer (1973: 87), obtaining greater amounts of *kibri* was the primary goal toward which ambitious men in the village strove. Beyond establishing and maintaining an independent household, ambitious persons could increase the amount of *kibri* they possessed by increasing their wealth and - by means of this wealth - the extent of their political power. Ideally, this would lead to a significant expansion of one's *risti* land (usually through the courts), to holding a political office, and/or to receiving a noble title. Each of these accomplishments conferred significant *kibri*.

However, few individuals in a village context achieved all of these. More commonly, ambitious men acquired more *kibri* by accumulating wealth and converting that wealth into honour through the creation of networks of dependants. Having more dependants conferred more honour, in part because it increased the number of people who would publicly show deference and respect but also because it increased the number of people who would follow orders. As noted earlier in the chapter, although there was no law that dependants follow a patron's orders, most found it

expedient to do so. Thus, having more dependants increased the number of people over whose lives an ambitious man had some control. Importantly, having control over other peoples' lives increased one's *kibri* only to the extent that such control was seen to be legitimate. As Hoben (1970: 197, italics in original) observes:

Kibur, which I will gloss as "honor", the attribute that commands deference and determines rank order, derives above all else from the legitimate control or influence over people or their destinies.

Accumulating wealth was thus not the ultimate goal of aspiring individuals; rather, the goal was to convert that wealth into "bigness" (*kibrn*) through the creation and expansion of a personal network of dependants. Networks of dependence constitute the second aspect of social stratification during the late imperial period. As Bauer (1973: 87) explains:

While some relationships imply equality, they are few and are relevant in few contexts. Most relationships are vertically dyadic, implying inequality... Men are thought to relate to one another in terms of a pyramidal structure of superior-subordinate relationships, and not as equals in a system of corporate groups.

Hoben (1970: 194) makes a similar point about social relationships among the Amhara:

This constant concern with the etiquette of deference is not primarily oriented toward membership in ranked segments of society, descent groups, or the nexus of kinship relations. It is rather defined, at least in secular scenes, by personal, dyadic, hierarchical social ties between persons who have access to political office and land, and those who depend upon them.

Kibri was intimately bound up in, and productive of, the particular forms of social relationships that existed prior to land reform. It operated along the intersection of the two aspects of social stratification discussed here. Aside from those with secular or ecclesiastical title, the "biggest" individuals in Hareyna - and in Enda Mariyam - were those who translated the material resources at their disposal into status-honour by establishing themselves as benefactor to large networks of dependants. Within these networks of dependence, goods and services flowed in more or less the same basic pattern: that is, an outward flow of food, loans of grain and loans of oxen from big men and an inward flow of agricultural and other forms of labour from poorer farmers.

These exchanges were not simply economic in nature, however. Rather, they were heavily embedded in cultural expressions of superior-subordinate relationships - such as the ranking behaviours described by Bauer - that in turn both generated and reflected *kibri*. As Bauer (1973: 67) notes:

It is upward movement in terms of honor which men seem to be trying to achieve and it is largely through the manipulation of ties of inequality that men attempt to improve their standing with respect to honor. The superior expects that his honor will be enhanced through the relationships he maintains with his subordinates, and the subordinate has the same expectations with respect to the relationships he maintains with his superiors.

3.2 Searching for *Kibri* in the Present Day

Given the importance of the notion of *kibri* to social action in the late imperial period, one of the tasks undertaken during fieldwork was the exploration of how *kibri* operates in the present day. It was initially assumed that ranking of persons according to the amount of *kibri* they possessed, and why certain persons were "higher" or "lower" than others, would provide important clues to the nature of social relationships in the post-revolutionary period.

However when, following Bauer, an attempt at such ranking was made, it quickly became apparent that this was not possible. Not only did informants provide inconsistent responses as to how such ranking was to be accomplished, many asserted that ranking itself was no longer possible. The task then became one of exploring the meaning of *kibri* in the present day. This elicited a series of diverse and sometimes contradictory responses:

Today, only the *Woyane* (TPLF) have *kibri*.

Now, farmers are all equal but monks have *kibri*.

We can say one is *kibur* who is decent, who keeps secrets, who has good conduct and who co-operates with people. One who has wealth can also be *kibur*, but there are also people who are poor who have *kibri* due to their conduct. But I know that there are other people who don't agree with me. They only respect the rich. But I focus more on character.

It is just to be polite that we show elders or priests respect by serving them first. So you can say that now *kibri* is just for serving coffee. But during Haile Selassie's time, it was clear who had *kibri*. Now, everyone has their own idea about this.

Now, *kibri* is not useful. There is no benefit from having more *kibri*. The main thing is to get rich. In the past, people were working for *kibri*, but now they only work to become rich. In the past, people thought about *kibri*. But today, everyone is equal. Today, *kibri* is useless.

The remark that "Today, *kibri* is useless" suggests that there has been a fundamental change in the nature of social stratification since the time of Bauer's ethnography. It reflects the fact that this central cultural notion - which, if we follow Bauer (1973: 87), formed the primary goal toward which "all Tigray with ambition" worked - no longer operates in the same manner. In Enda Mariyam, some people say *kibri* is a function of wealth, others a function of character, while some people imply it has no currency in the present day at all. In other words, the notion of *kibri* has fragmented in meaning. To understand why this has occurred, it is necessary to explore how the configuration of social relationships has changed since land reform, as a consequence of new patterns of exchange and dependence.

3.3 New Configurations of Exchange and Dependence

With several teams of oxen at their disposal and a large amount of land area to cover, big men such as Geta Gesso had high labour requirements. Two factors in particular helped contribute to this high requirement. First is the nature of the agricultural cycle itself, which - tied as it is to rainfall patterns in the single rainy season - dictates that certain activities must be completed within relatively short periods of time. Compounding this was a second factor: namely, the large number of saints' days and other holy days in the Ethiopian Orthodox calendar during which no agricultural work should occur. With the work of farming compressed into small intervals as a result of these constraints, individuals who managed the cultivation of a large area of land required many hands at one time.

The ability of men such as Geta Seifu to obtain large amounts of agricultural labour was in part a function of the way labour resources circulated in the local economy

prior to land reform. With a large percentage of households lacking adequate farm capital (oxen) and holding unviably small plots, there were many poor farmers whose labour was available for employment:

The poor were sitting simply in the past. Sometimes they might do *mebaro*, but otherwise they were sitting simply sitting... When I was a boy, during the time of Haile Selassie, there were more people looking for work. They would even work for lunch only (Mebratu Kidan, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

Similarly, Bauer (1973: 129) remarks that, in Hareyna, "Labour is abundant", and that:

Additional labor may be hired for little more than the cost of food... six to eight U.S. dollars per year, plus food.

The availability and relatively low cost of labour described for the pre-reform period can be compared to the situation today. During the peak period of ploughing and planting in June and July, informants in Enda Mariyam reported in 1993 that adult male labour cost 7 to 8 *birr* per day, plus food; during less critical ploughing periods such as March and April, the price of labour dropped to 6 to 7 *birr* per day plus food. Moreover, few people were actually working as paid farm labourers in the village in 1993. Not only were the costs of hiring in a worker beyond the reach of many households but costs were themselves a reflection of the lack of availability of farm labour during peak periods in the agricultural cycle.

Although such comparisons are by nature imprecise, they at least give a general indication that the cost of farm labour has risen within a village context since the late imperial period. The fact that farm labour costs have risen, in turn, can be linked to changes in the local economy precipitated by land reform, and especially the way labour patterns have shifted.

As noted earlier, land reform means that every household in Enda Mariyam now holds approximately 0.8 hectares. Although this is a small allotment in terms of meeting household consumption requirements, it is nevertheless a feasible amount of land for engaging in plough cultivation. Also, as noted earlier, there is evidence that more households own oxen than was previously the case. With adequate land for ploughing - and in many cases an improved quality of soil - combined with higher

levels of oxen ownership, the amount of income a poor farmer can earn from cultivating their own land has risen. Hence, whereas prior to land reform many poor farmers found it necessary to direct much of their labour to the land of big men, this is no longer the case. Rather, the labour of poorer farmers is now directed primarily toward their own production. As one informant put it, "In the past, the poor didn't plough, but now they do." With more households engaged in ploughing their own holdings, there is less "unemployed" labour available within the village during periods of high demand.

The shift in the way labour is directed within the village can also be seen in the fact that, according to informants, the practice of *siso* was much more common prior to land reform than it is today. That is, oxenless farmers are less willing to use up precious labour days working someone else's land in exchange for the loan of oxen. Instead, as seen in Chapter 3, they prefer to maximise labour on their own land and to pay for oxen with straw whenever possible.

Another contributing factor is the fact that there is much less benefit to be had from directing one's labour to the farms of the rich. This is because the rich can no longer afford to provide the same level of support in the form of loans of grain and gifts of food as was previously the case. Indeed, one of the more frequent comments I heard about the difference between the past and the present was the decline in the ability of the rich to provide loans to the poor:

Today and the past are very different things. In the past, there were rich people and the poor could work for them. And the rich gave them loans of grain. But now, all are poor and there is no big loan (Haleka Wolde Michael Kasai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

Now there is a small land, and there is no one who gives big loans. Now there are no rich anymore. Only those people who have oxen ask the poor to rent their land, and the poor ask for a loan to the rich who rented the land. Today's loan is like this (Haleka Tsgai Abraha, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

As the latter comment suggests, although grain loans are still an important strategy for poorer households, the way in which loans are provided has changed. As noted in Chapter 3, the majority of grain loans in the village today occur in the context of land rental transactions, rather than in the context of sets of pyramidal-structured

relationships between big men and their poorer dependants. With land rental transactions operating today on a more market-driven basis, loan agreements appear more diffuse and widely scattered throughout the village:

In the past, the poor may ask the rich for a loan, and the rich will give him. In exchange, the poor will work for the rich. Now, if you want a loan you ask relatives or close friends first. But if you don't have these you go anywhere asking for a loan (Gebre Kidan Tekie, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

Indeed, the only creditor-debtor relationships I found that resembled descriptions of the past, mainly in terms of the depth of dependence implied, were those between poorer farmers and relatively grain-rich monks.⁷⁹ Because monks hold land but have no dependents to provide for, they tend to have far more grain at their disposal than priests or lay peasants. However, because they are *menani* ("out of the world"), monks do no physical work themselves but rely on lay peasants to farm the land on their behalf, in exchange for loans of grain or other forms of support.

According to one Enda Mariyam farmer, Tsgai Mebratu, his dependence on a monk resident in the Mariyam monastery included loans of cash as well as grain. Most of the dwellings in Tsgai's compound were built with money provided as a long-term loan from this monk, and he regularly relied on the monk to loan adequate seed prior to planting. These loans was never called in as such, but Tsgai worked the monk's land and provided other forms of service as needed. Just prior to my arrival in Enda Mariyam, the monk decided to leave the village. In consequence, the economic circumstances of Tsgai's household had worsened considerably.

Apart from those involving monks, the only other relationships that I found that resembled the patron-client relations of the past were, in effect, "holdovers" from the pre-reform era. For example, Araya Haloof, the poor farmer discussed at the beginning of the chapter, still frequently visits the homestead of his old patron, Tekle Himinut Yohanis, to offer his service. However, Tekle Himinut Yohanis's wealth has declined considerably in the past twenty years, and he can offer Araya and his household little more than the chance to eat and drink in a slightly better fashion

⁷⁹ These relationships were somewhat unique to Enda Mariyam by virtue of the presence there of the Mariyam monastery.

during religious holidays than they could manage on their own. In fact, the relationship between them is now largely symbolic; Araya still rises to give his seat to Tekle Himinut Yohanis, and Tekle Himinut Yohanis still asks Araya to perform small tasks on his behalf.

Otherwise, the nature of creditor-debtor relationships in Enda Mariyam has changed since land reform. Loans are smaller in size, and repayment is usually expected in kind. More significantly, although a debtor may deem it expedient to provide some limited form of service to a creditor to increase the chances of future loans, the provision of labour is no longer a fundamental aspect of the transaction:

Before, the poor will ask the rich for a loan, and the rich will give. In return, the poor will work for the rich. But now, when the poor ask for a loan they don't have to work for the rich. Now, if someone has a serious problem they may say, "I will work for you - please give me a loan", but otherwise it is not necessary to work for the rich to get a loan (Gebre Kidan Tekie, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

3.4 Social Organisation and the Decline of *Kibri*

The above descriptions suggest that vertical relationships of economic dependence no longer constitute the main structuring element in village-level social organisation. Although, as seen in Chapter 3, richer households still loan out grain and oxen, personalised networks of dyadic ties between big men and clusters of poorer farmers - centred around grain-for-labour exchanges and laden with symbolic demonstrations of subordination and superordination - no longer exist.

This was also seen in the course of a social network survey undertaken with the 42 households in Endabazbanom *got* of Enda Mariyam. The survey involved interviews with each head of household concerning their relationships with other households or individuals. Most of the questions aimed at charting the networks that existed for mutual support and loans or exchanges of labour, oxen and grain.⁸⁰ One of the objectives of the survey was to reproduce a similar diagram of neighbourhood relations as that produced by Bauer in Hareyna (see Bauer, 1973: 112).

⁸⁰ See Appendix 1, Section 3.5 for a description of this survey.

However, it quickly became apparent that this was not possible. As noted earlier in the chapter, Bauer's diagram clearly indicates the central position of big men in the neighbourhood by means of broken lines emanating outwards from two such households. In my own diagram, however, not only was it not possible to clearly identify the big men but lines indicating relationships of economic dependence became so complex and confused as to be virtually unreadable. The attempt to produce a diagram was consequently abandoned.

The social network survey provided apparent confirmation for the hypothesis developed from informant descriptions of the past. That is, that in the aftermath of land reform it is no longer appropriate to characterise social organisation, in the way Hoben (1973: 168) did, as "a pyramidal network of personal dyadic ties of subordination and superordination." Instead, ties of dependence between households appear far more complex and dispersed, as household heads range more widely in terms of the social networks they call upon to obtain support. This, in turn, is a function of the levelling down in wealth and the disappearance of big men. Without big men to act as foci of goods-for-labour exchanges, the circulation of goods and labour in the local economy has become more diffuse. Household heads now call upon a broader spectrum of social relationships to obtain what they need because what they need is no longer concentrated in a small number of hands. In this regard, the configuration of relationships of dependence within the village has changed:

In the past, there were a few rich people. They had *risti* land. All the other people would work for these rich people. For example, in weeding all people would go to one plot to weed. But now there is no rich. Now, the maximum the rich can do is eat the whole year by themselves. When we compare, in the past most people were working for others, but now most people work for themselves. In the past, everybody was depending on somebody, and you couldn't be by yourself. But now, all became poor and there are few people who depend on others (Haleka Wolde Michael Kasai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

It is this change in the configuration of relationships of dependence that has rendered *kibri* "useless". After land reform, it is no longer possible to convert wealth into honour in the same way because it is no longer possible to accumulate sufficient wealth to establish networks of dependants over whom one can have the same degree of

control or influence. Aside from the exceptions noted above, relationships of dependence in the present day are scattered more widely across the households in the village and are of a lesser individual magnitude than was once the case. In other words, because vertical ties of dependence are no longer central to the social organisation of the village, they no longer provide the vehicle for increasing one's status-honour, or "bigness".

At the same time, there is little point in seeking to acquire greater amounts of status-honour, because status-honour no longer translates into a ranked position within the village social hierarchy. Rather, because the structure of social relationships that supported the production of *kibri* has disappeared, there is no longer a village-wide consensus as to how ranking should be done, or whether it should be done at all. This was illustrated in the course of the only other feast seen in Enda Mariyam during the period of fieldwork: namely, the one I myself gave upon leaving the village. Although some of the older people present rose to give their seats to Geta Seifu when he arrived, others - including many young men - pointedly refused to do so. These young men did rise and relinquish their seats, however, for members of the *wereda* administration.

In a context where there is no longer consensus as to who has or does not have "bigness", the notion of *kibri* itself has fragmented and its potency has declined. As an informant quoted earlier remarked, "There is no benefit from having more *kibri*. The main thing is to get rich." In effect, the decline in the potency of *kibri* can be seen as the symbolic reflection of the disappearance of the traditional big man.

4. Perceptions of Change, Old and Young

To conclude this chapter, it is worth briefly considering one further aspect of the disappearance of big men having to do with perceptions of poverty in the present day versus the past.

During fieldwork, comments about the greater poverty of the present were frequently heard from older informants, on the order of "we are all poor now." Such comments

are often interpreted by outsiders as a reference to the combined effects of drought and warfare in the 1980s and early 1990s. There is little doubt that these events did deepen rural poverty, especially in terms of a decline in livestock and especially oxen numbers.

However, comments from older informants suggest more than the experience of an extended period of dearth; they imply belief in a linear progression from greater to lesser wealth within the village. In this regard, that the past was "richer" than the present is not simply a function of cyclical drought; it is also a function of the disappearance of big men. Because there are no longer any households that possess wealth on a scale commensurate with the past, significant wealth is no longer visible at village level.

More particularly, there are no longer any households that can afford to host large feasts on holy days in the Ethiopian Orthodox calendar, or large ceremonies in the event of weddings, christenings, and other occasions. Indeed, the only feast that occurred during two years of fieldwork was held in a neighbouring village, and was hosted by a man who was not resident in that village but who lived in the regional capital, Makele. According to this man, the large *teskar* he hosted for his deceased relative was made possible not through wealth generated at village level but through the sale of some of his property in the town.

Otherwise, with the exception of community-wide events organised to commemorate the armed struggle and the formation of the TPLF, there were no large ceremonies in the village during the period of fieldwork. Older informants in particular were less interested in community rituals built around symbols of the armed struggle and the TPLF. These include, notably, the celebration of the founding of the TPLF in the month of Yekatit (February). The celebration is organised by local members of the various Mass Associations. Unlike "traditional" ceremonies marking lifecycle events or religious occasions, Yekatit is wholly secular; it does not occur in the meeting area adjoining the Mariyam church and is not presided over by priests or monks. It involves the gathering of community members on the land in front of the *tabiya* school and speeches and dramas staged by Mass Associations members.

With regard to more traditional events, while there were a number of weddings, christenings and funerals during the period of fieldwork, these were small affairs and bore little resemblance to the large ceremonies of the past. The impression of greater poverty in the present day is thus underpinned by the impression of impoverishment in the ritual life of the village. Older informants frequently remarked on the decline in both frequency and size of ceremonial occasions:

In the time of Haile Selassie we were rich, and there were very big ceremonies for weddings, with large quantities of food and *sewa* (beer). We had so many occasions to eat and drink. Now, people are poor and there are no big ceremonies anymore (Kidān Gebre Michael, farmer's wife, Enda Mariyam).

As this comment suggests, that "there are no big ceremonies anymore" is most acutely felt in terms of the loss of feasting occasions when food and drink are consumed in large quantities. Levine (1965) has described the social and symbolic significance of eating and drinking beyond what is required for sustenance in Amhara society. He notes (Levine, 1965: 224), for example, that many figures of speech relate to the experience of oral consumption:

Feasting is called for on every possible occasion - christening, funerals, and memorial services, as well as engagements, weddings, and annual holidays... The duration of any large celebration is said to depend on how long the food and drink last; successful ones go on for three days. Linguistic usage stresses the oral function on such occasions. One "eats at", rather than attends, a christening party; one "drinks in" rather than belongs to a *mahebar*; one expects to "eat at", rather than dance at, somebody's wedding. The very word for Easter, "Fasiqa", literally means "great feast".

In contrast to older informants, slightly different perceptions of the past were often expressed by members of a younger generation that do not have adult memories of Emperor Haile Selassie, but who were more active participants in various aspects of the "armed struggle". Such informants generally attribute the poverty of the present more directly to the effects of drought, warfare, and underdevelopment, and regard the levelling down in wealth precipitated by land reform as a positive effect:

In the past, the landlords had more land, but now everyone has the same amount. This is good for the poor, but the rich don't like it (Gebre Meskel Tekie, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

Only the *mesfint*⁸¹ says things were better before. They didn't want the poor to have land, which they do now. Now the people of Tigray have an equal chance with other people of Ethiopia, and this has meant developments such as the road and the grinding mill. In the past there were a few people who had more land, but now the land is distributed equally for children, women and men. In the past, only rich households could give land to their children. Now, all can give land to their children (Alem Techliwoini, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

As these comments suggest, there are tensions between generations in terms of the way the pre-revolutionary past is interpreted. These tensions are underpinned by other factors that affect generational relations, themselves related to land reform. In particular, land reform has led to subtle but nevertheless important changes in the way resources are transferred from one generation to the next in the context of new household creation. This issue is considered further in the next chapter.

⁸¹ Here, the word *mesfint* - traditionally meaning "lord" - is more appropriately translated in its modern form, as something on the order of "feudal reactionary".

CHAPTER 5 - MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND SEPARATION

1. Introduction

New households are formed primarily through marriage. In cases of first marriage, this involves separation from the parental household and the creation of a new, independent social unit. Newly-separated couples, however, face myriad challenges in establishing a viable household enterprise. For this and other reasons, divorce is common. Each of these processes - marriage, divorce and separation - involves not just the creation or dissolution of households, but also the transfer of personnel, rights, and property. This chapter considers ways in which institutional reform has led to changes in marriage, divorce, and separation practices.

The contingencies of householding are central to Tigray social life and can be said to structure the pathways of decision-making for every individual. Heading or being a member of a large, independent household is a key goal of most Tigray. This involves the management of household resources in relation to personnel and environmental conditions at any given time. For Weissleder (1965), the decisions, opportunities and constraints involved in maintaining a viable household enterprise are so central to Amhara social life that they constitute a framework - or "recurrent structural configuration" - for decision-making at large, on a broader political scale. As he explains:

Thirty or forty separate homesteads as a collectivity neither generate nor demand a political superstructure materially different from themselves. The dominant establishment which overarches them all is governed in its tactics by the same principles and necessities, and resolves its problems by selecting from the same range of alternatives. Decision-making at all levels is virtually bounded by considerations of householding: tasks of an essentially domestic nature must be matched to the availability of personnel and the availability of resources, two factors positively correlated with each other (Weissleder, 1965: 233).

According to Weissleder (1965, 1974), who conducted one of the few village-based studies of marriage and divorce among the Ankober Amhara, the rationale for marriage and divorce cannot be separated from the dictates of householding in the ox-plough farming system:

Marriage, in the hard-headed and realistic world of the peasant, is thought about in the pragmatic terms of household formation and organization of a livelihood... In one way or another, practically all essentials are organized, procured, and guaranteed through the institution of marriage (Weissleder, 1974: 72).

This approach to marriage and divorce may appear overly materialist. Pankhurst (1992), for example, critiques Weissleder for emphasising the economic aspects of marriage and divorce to the neglect of emotional factors, and cites evidence of the complexity of marital decisions among the Menz Amhara. However, Weissleder's assertion that the pragmatic considerations of householding form the underlying rationale for marital decision-making does not deny the complexity of those decisions. Nor does his assertion seem inappropriate in a context where, when the pragmatic considerations of householding fail, the household itself may collapse, its members disperse, and its existence as a distinct social unit cease. The intimate connection that Weissleder draws between householding and marital decision-making is also supported by informant comments, and by marriage histories collected in Enda Mariyam village.

In his study of the effect of TPLF land reform on various aspects of Tigray social life, Chiari (1996: 9) suggests that land reform triggered, amongst other things, a profound change in household structure. This is a bold claim. As shown in Chapters 3 and 4, land reform did not alter the basic premises of the Tigray farming system, or the correlation between oxen ownership and household wealth. Tasks in the domestic and production fields that must be fulfilled for the household to continue as a viable enterprise have not fundamentally changed since land reform, nor has the basic gender division of labour. Given this, we would not expect to see profound changes in the structure of the social unit that carries out production and consumption functions - the household - or at least we would not expect to see such changes as a consequence of land reform alone. Evidence from Enda Mariyam suggests that household structure has not fundamentally changed since Bauer carried out his fieldwork in the late 1960s: in both villages, the most common household form is that of a husband and wife and young dependants.

While land reform did not appear to alter household structure, the chapter will nevertheless argue that it did precipitate important changes in marriage, divorce and separation practices. Further, although it did not affect the gender division of labour, the chapter will consider how land reform, together with other institutional reforms, led to changes in the balance of power between men and women and the capacity for autonomy of women within marriage. It will also consider how land reform has altered the nature of first-marriage separation, the relationship between fathers and sons and, in a larger sense, the relationship between older and younger generations.

As before, Bauer's work (1973, 1977) serves as an approximate baseline for pre-reform social life. Bauer's 1977 study is devoted almost entirely to what he calls a "path analysis of the farming household." In this study, Bauer describes ideal, expected, and actual developmental cycles for households, as well as the normative principles governing personnel and resource transfers in the context of marriage and divorce. This information has proved invaluable for an analysis of change since the advent of land reform.

2. Marriage, Cattle, and Land

McCann (1995: 72) states that marriage in the ox-plough farming complex is the social mechanism whereby a household farming unit is created, and through which it is "capitalised" upon formation. A marriage contract brings together the personnel and resources necessary to equip a new household. Marriage agreements stipulate what resources each of the parental or sponsoring households will transfer to the new couple.

In normative terms, the process of contracting a marriage in Enda Mariyam can be briefly outlined as follows. The sponsoring household of the groom - which is usually the parental household but may be another relative or indeed a non-relative - seeks out the sponsoring household of a prospective bride. If the initial approach is favourable, senior members of the groom's household will visit the bride's household and present a gift of specially prepared bread. The bride's household will serve them coffee. Both households will agree on the *shumagele*, or elders, who will act as guarantors for the marriage contract. The time between the marriage agreement and

the marriage ceremony may be long or short, but for first marriages it is typically around one year.

Property pledged to the new couple from each side should be roughly commensurate in value. Typically, the bride's household will provide cattle, and the groom's household will provide grain and clothing. Both households are also expected to provide the necessary implements and equipment for labour in the respective spheres of the bride and groom: ploughing and agricultural tools for the groom, and food preparation and water storage items for the bride. Once the betrothal has been agreed, there will be an initial exchange between the two sponsoring households to show good faith. The groom's household will provide a gift of clothing for the bride, and the bride's household will respond by transferring a cow or calf to the groom's household. After this exchange, the betrothal is considered a firm contract and cannot be broken by either party without paying compensation.

Once the marriage ceremony has taken place, the bride becomes, in effect, a member of the groom's household, where she is given a new name. She will spend up to a year travelling back and forth between her new home and her natal household. For the most part, however, she will work alongside her mother-in-law, under her direction, until such time as the new couple formally separate from the groom's parental household, to establish their own household. The groom, for his part, will be under obligation to provide his bride's household with labour, and especially ploughing labour during the agricultural season.

Typically, the marriage of a son or daughter involves a re-alignment of personnel and resources in the sponsoring household. For the groom's household, there is a temporary increase in the labour force in the domestic sphere, as well as a temporary increase in cattle wealth until the new couple separate to establish their own household. For a household that is faltering, the marriage of a son may thus provide the opportunity for recovery, especially if the bride's household has provided one or two oxen. Upon separation of the new couple from the parental household, however, the groom's parental household will not only be deprived of these cattle but will also lose the labour of the son. As will be seen later in the chapter, the process of separation to establish a new household is known for the bad feelings generated between father and son.

The marriage of a daughter has a more immediate effect on the sponsoring household, due to the loss of both the daughter's labour and cattle. In some cases this can mean substantial hardship. During the second year of fieldwork, for example, a farmer named Gebre Kidan Tekie agreed to the betrothal of his young daughter and, upon receiving a gift of clothing from the groom's household, sent them a cow, a calf, an ox and a bull. He also intended to provide a second ox on her marriage. This substantial gift of cattle started Gebre Kidan's household on a downward economic trend which, following a poor harvest, forced him into the position of accepting a government-sponsored loan of seed. Prior to this, Gebre Kidan prided himself on never having to accept a loan of any kind.

Gebre Kidan's gift of cattle is the exception rather than the rule, however and is more reminiscent of marriage exchanges prior to revolutionary reform (see below). More typically, a smaller number of cattle will be provided, usually comprising only one animal, often a cow, or at most a cow and a calf. As will be seen below, this is in distinct contrast to the substantial cattle dowries that were normative for first marriages during the *ancien regime*.

2.1 Marriage Prior to Reform

During the imperial period, first marriages were called *merah kefti*. These were, in effect, an alliance between the bride's and the groom's sponsoring households for the purposes of resourcing a new couple. In *merah kefti*, the choice of spouse for a son or daughter was the prerogative of the head of the sponsoring households.

Merah kefti - meaning, literally, "cattle marriage" - involved the transfer of a large number of cattle from the bride's to the groom's household. Bauer refers to this as a "dowry" (see Bauer 1973; 1977). This is a reasonable use of the term. Following Goody (1973), dowry can be qualified as a form of pre-mortem inheritance to the bride. Although in many cases, as in Tigray, the bride's household acquires use of the property (cattle) for a period of time, it is the bride who eventually receives this property. In this regard, dowry functions essentially as a conjugal fund. Upon divorce, it is divisible between the bride and groom, not between the bride's kin and groom's

kin.⁸² The groom's household, on the other hand, was expected to provide the couple with a supply of grain equivalent to one-third of their reserves, as well, typically, as a certain amount of *risti* land.

According to Bauer (1977: 122), the size of cattle dowries in Hareyna was large, typically comprising about twice the size of the average household's oxen holding. In comparison, the value of the grain provided by the groom's household was very small. Indeed, Bauer (1977: 162) suggests that in Hareyna, the groom's sponsoring household contributed virtually nothing, a situation that contrasts with Amhara first-marriage practices, in which "there are matching gifts from each sponsoring household."

The discrepancy in value of property provided by the two sponsoring households in Tigray was reflected in the extent to which the marriage of daughter was considered a heavy burden, while the marriage of a son was considered a blessing. As Besserat, a TPLF woman fighter quoted in Hammond (1989: 38), explains:

To have a girl born in the family was like a curse. If she had a dowry, the family would be poorer, but if she had been born a boy, they would have received a dowry from another family. Tigrayan girls were brought up in a family that openly showed them they didn't want them.

However, the expense of sponsoring a daughter's marriage typically occurred only once, in the context of a *merah kefti*. *Merah kefti* were normative for first marriage contracts only.⁸³ Subsequent marriage contracts were usually of another type, known as *birkinet*. *Birkinet* marriage occurred when two partial households, created as a consequence of divorce, came together to form one "whole" household, with each spouse bringing complementary property and resources.

According to Bauer (1977: 132), the word "*birkinet*" derives from *birki*, meaning "knee"; *birkinet* marriages thus imply a degree of equality between the partners,

⁸² The exception was when divorce occurred before the formal separation of the couple to establish their own household, in which case property was either returned to the sponsoring households, or suitable compensation paid.

⁸³ Bauer (1977: 132) notes, however, that a "cattle marriage" might be contracted for a second marriage, where the first marriage ended before separation to create a distinct, new household.

because "both partners, like the two knees which support the body, support the household." Unlike *merah kefti*, *birkinet* marriage did not create an alliance between two sponsoring households because there were, in effect, no sponsors. Instead, the arrangement was made between the bride and groom themselves, who together chose a group of marriage *shumagele* to witness the merger of property from each. Importantly, the value of property brought by both the bride and the groom should be roughly equivalent in value. Because divorce was common in Hareyna, most of the households in the Hareyna were formed, according to Bauer (1977), by *birkinet* marriage contracts.

In addition to *birkinet* and *merah kefti*, there was also a third type of marriage, called *gerdena*, or "servant" marriage. In cases where a man required the immediate addition of a woman to his household in order to manage tasks in the domestic sphere, he might arrange for a *gerdena* marriage. In *gerdena*, property is not jointly held between husband and wife; instead, a wife is paid an annual "gift" of grain. *Gerdena* marriages were usually contracted on a short-term basis. Women lacking property to bring to a marriage were sometimes forced to accept this kind of arrangement. Female informants say *gerdena* was the least desirable marriage from the woman's point of view, because a woman would then have no rights to any share of property accumulated by the household in the event of divorce.

The details of pre-revolutionary marriage contracts and the forms of property transfer they implied do not figure prominently in much of the available literature on the Tigray revolution. Rather, this literature tends to concentrate on various forms of women's oppression within marriage and in traditional society more generally. Hammond (1989: 31), for example, describes the position of rural women in the pre-reform period:

Women were at the bottom of the hierarchy of oppression. They had no rights of any kind, but the worst deprivation was the absence of rights to land. This condemned peasant women to the kind of dependency normally associated only with domestic animals.

This picture seems at odds with that provided by ethnographic studies of the northern peasantry, which emphasise the autonomy of adult women. Bauer (1977:139) notes, for example, that a woman heading her own household is "a juro-political adult with

full rights to participate in community affairs." He also suggests (1977: 164) that, "Because Tigray women are potential jural actors from the time their household is set up, husbands have little control over them." Similarly, Poluha (1989: 63) suggests that the weakness of the marriage bond is "a consequence of the independence of Ashena women."

These somewhat contradictory impressions can be reconciled, however, if we consider the distinction between the formal rights women possessed in traditional society and actual practice with regard to their control over resources, such as land, and their status within marriage. With regard to rights in land, Chapter 2 explained how, under the *risti* tenure system, male and female lines were equally valid in terms of tracing rights of cultivation on specific *risti* estates. In theory, this meant that women had equal rights of access to a share of *risti* land with men. In reality, however, women functioned almost exclusively as the vehicle for transmission of these rights to sons or brothers and rarely obtained actual control over land themselves.

The principle of equal partition is a feature of Tigray peasant society.⁸⁴ In theory, every child has the right to an equal portion of the parental household's landholding.⁸⁵ In practice, however, there were significant differences between male and female children. Upon a son's marriage, a household head would typically grant that son a portion of their *risti* landholding as, in effect, a pre-mortem inheritance. In the case of daughters, however, marriage gifts consisted of cattle rather than land. According to informants in Enda Mariyam, a woman could only expect to receive a portion of the *risti* land of her parental household after the death of both parents:

⁸⁴ Hoben (1975: 165) notes a similar principle among the Amhara: "The parental household's estate of land is rapidly broken up by the rule that it should be divided equally among all children."

⁸⁵ The exceptions are "fostered" children; that is, hired children or children of kin who have been brought into the household to fill labour requirements, or who are being raised as a service to poor relations who cannot afford their upbringing. As Hoben (1973: 164) notes, such children can expect their marriages to be sponsored by their "adopted" parents and, in exchange, to look after these parents in old age; they cannot, however, expect to receive a share of their land.

When a girl marries, if her parents are alive, they have to give her cattle. But if they are dead, she may inherit some land. She can take this land with her if she marries - it is her *risti*. But there are only a few cases like this in the past. Mostly, the father or mother is alive and they give her cattle when she marries, or there is an older brother. If there is an older brother, and the parents are dead, the older brother acts like the father. He will keep her land for himself, and he will give her cattle instead (Haleka Wolde Michael Kasai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

Assuming a woman did bring land to a marriage, this was effectively subsumed under the control of her husband. As one informant said, "In the past, a woman can't have *risti* land. Once she is married, her husband claims it". Husbands not only claimed control over *risti* land brought to marriage by their wives; they also gained the ability to file additional claims through the bundle of *risti* rights their wives passed on to children. According to people in Enda Mariyam, it was common for a husband to initiate claims to new land by virtue of rights he acquired through children. In some cases, these claims were made against his wife's own relatives:

I married a woman, and after we had children, I made a claim against her father. I said, "I claim a share of your *risti* land through my children". I went to the court and claimed this through my wife. I got this land from her father, but my wife didn't get any land for herself (Haleka Tsgai Abraha, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

In case of divorce, women were often unable to mobilise enough influence in the context of divorce proceedings to retain control of the land of their former household. In many cases, a payment by the divorced husband to the father of the woman would be enough to settle the matter. In consequence, as Hoben (1975: 169) observes, a woman who inherited *risti* land would sometimes turn control of that land over to a brother, rather than entrust it to a husband with whom the bond was "tenuous at best." In this regard, women's rights in *risti* land were operationalised through male kin or husbands, and women rarely achieved actual control over their own plots of land.

The fact that women functioned as vehicles for the transmission of *risti* rights, and received cattle as a pre-mortem inheritance upon marriage, contributed to the practice of female child betrothal and marriage. Female child marriages were relatively common in the imperial period. As a general rule, the larger the potential cattle dowry

the bride's household could be expected to bestow, the earlier the betrothal and marriage ages pressed for by the groom's household. Similarly, the better the extent and quality of *risti* estates the bride's household could lay claim to, and which, through the bride, would be available to the groom after the birth of children, the greater the pressure for an early betrothal and marriage.

According to informants, assuming the groom's parents or sponsors were of good repute and possessed status-honour within the village, it was difficult for a bride's household to resist these pressures for long. Although marriage *shumagele* and parish priests usually warned husbands against a forced sexual relationship with a girl who had not yet reached maturity, there was no actual penalty for doing so. In consequence, the early stages of marriage were often characterised by the frequent "escape" and forced return of young brides (see Hammond, 1989).

A corollary to the early marriage of female children was the physical abuse of women within marriage. Although Bauer suggests (1977: 164) that, because women were potential jural actors in their own right, "husbands have little control over them", in fact husbands frequently did assert *de facto*, if not *de jure* control by means of physical force. This is well-illustrated by the Tigray proverb, "Take a stick to your oxen, but a stave to your wife" (Hammond, 1989: 31). Similarly, Poluha (1989: 66) calls attention to the use of physical abuse within Amhara marriage as a means for husbands to counteract the autonomy of wives:

Although women in many respects have the same rights as men, the latter dominate their common life in other ways. Physical force is an important means of maintaining this domination and many women are beaten by their husbands.

Given the above, the picture of women's oppression provided in much of the literature on the Tigray revolution is not wide of the mark. Rather, it reflects the daily reality of women's lives in traditional society. In the following section, reform measures aimed at addressing the oppression of women are considered.

2.2 Marriage and Reform

The TPLF was concerned to effect a radical transformation of traditional society. A key element of this transformation would be the liberation of women from various forms of "feudal" oppression. This involved, amongst other measures, changes in customary marriage contracts that would promote the rights of women within marriage, and in case of divorce. Such changes were also called for on the assumption that certain kinds of traditional marriage promoted the continuation of a patriarchal family form. While there are no TPLF documents in English that provide a rationale for why it sought to eliminate the "patriarchal family", an analysis of similar reform measures implemented by the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front) is instructive.⁸⁶

The family is defined by the EPLF as the basic unit of society, and the patriarchal extended family is the primary site for the reproduction of the social and gender inequalities found within Eritrean feudo-capitalism... Reform of the family is thus one strand of a strategy for social transformation, and is attributed the same importance as the establishment of village administrations and economic (land) reform... Freedom for women can be attained only when this power of the kin group to arrange marriages is smashed... The 1977 Marriage Law is the primary mechanism through which this is to be achieved (Silkin, 1989: 12).

Rather than enacting a specific marriage law, however, TPLF cadre initiated discussion of changes in customary marriage law in the context of an overall revision of the *tabiya serit*. As outlined in Chapter 2, customary rules governing aspects of village life were codified in writing for the first time during this review.⁸⁷

Most notable among the changes in customary marriage was the stipulation that all marriage contracts should follow the same basic formula. This formula included the abolition of dowry and the requirement that gifts from the sponsoring households of the bride and groom should be of commensurate value. In effect, although it is not

⁸⁶ Some of the TPLF leadership were initially trained by the EPLF. Some of the approaches to socio-economic reform adopted by the TPLF in the early years of the armed struggle are based on similar reforms implemented by the EPLF. The two organisations developed along divergent paths relatively quickly, however, as the nature of the wars they were fighting, their political goals, and the methods of popular mobilisation utilised by each grew increasingly distinct.

⁸⁷ A translation of the main points of the *serit* for Enda Mariyam is included as Appendix 7.

labelled as such in the *serit*, this constituted the outlawing of all types of marriage except *birkinet*. Indeed, when asked, informants in Enda Mariyam insisted, "We only have *birkinet* now."

A key aim of the TPLF in prescribing a *birkinet*-like marriage contract was to minimise the control of the sponsoring household, and especially that of the bride. Although sponsoring households are not specifically prohibited from arranging marriages - and indeed, most first marriages contracted in Enda Mariyam during fieldwork were arranged by the parents - the *tabiya serit* specifies that agreement of both bride and the groom is also necessary. According to informants, this revision of the *serit* has also led to women asserting themselves more in choosing a marriage partner:

Before, a woman would never ask about the man; her parents would arrange everything for the marriage. But now, some women will ask about a man's conduct before they marry. This is a new thing for the woman to ask (Tsgae Halifa, farmer's wife, Enda Mariyam).

What has been the effect of this "standardisation" of the marriage contract? In Enda Mariyam, as seen from the normative description of marriage at the beginning of the chapter, people carry out a combination of old and new practices. Although *merah kefti*, or dowry marriage, is formally outlawed, in some cases a household that can afford to will still endow a daughter with a substantial gift of cattle for her first marriage, regardless of the value of gifts from the groom's sponsoring household. When Gebre Kidan Tekie, the father who provided a generous gift of cattle to his daughter described above, was asked why he did so, he replied that this would enable his daughter to "marry with confidence".

As noted earlier, however, Gebre Kidan Tekie is the exception rather than rule. In most cases, sponsoring households provide gifts of roughly equal value. This is usually watched over by the marriage *shumagele*. Nevertheless, in many cases what is given still conforms to traditional practice for first marriages; that is, the bride's household provides cattle, and the groom's household provides grain. Because most sponsoring households cannot afford to provide more than a single cow or perhaps a cow and calf, or a single ox, the principle of equal value is relatively easy to maintain. Were cattle gifts to rise much above this number, however, the groom's household would be hard pressed to provide an equivalent amount of grain.

An important implication of the change in marriage contract is that the distinction between the marriage of a daughter and the marriage of a son is no longer so marked. Although some sponsors may choose to provide a large gift for the marriage of a daughter, this is no longer a requirement for first marriage. Hence, although a household might falter economically in the aftermath of a daughter's marriage, this is less common today than in the pre-reform period. Changes in the cost of marriage sponsorship, especially for daughters, reduces, to some extent, the differential value attached to male and female offspring:

In the past, it was better to have a son. You got more benefit from his marriage. You could get cattle from his wife's household that you could use as your own until the couple was *guji wutsa*. But now, it is no difference to marry a son or a daughter (Tesfai Zenow, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

In tandem with the standardisation of marriage contracts, the TPLF also introduced two other measures intended to reduce the control of male kin over marriage and promote the status of women within marriage. The first was the prohibition against a husband using physical force against his wife. Penalties for wife-beating are strictly enforced by the *tabiya* justice committee; as a result, the physical abuse of women within marriage appears to have declined dramatically. The single case recorded during fieldwork was brought almost immediately before the justice committee, and a fine levied against the husband.

Second, the *serit* was revised to stipulate a minimum age for marriage, which in Enda Mariyam is 15 years for females and 22 years for males.⁸⁸ According to informants, this rule was strictly enforced by TPLF cadres, especially in the immediate aftermath of its adoption, and fines were levied against those who broke the rule. At present, the *tabiya bayto* is responsible for registering all marriage contracts, including the age of each spouse, and will refuse to register anyone under the legal minimum.

Nevertheless, the marriage of young girls under the age of 15 years still does take place. The young girl provided with a substantial gift of cattle mentioned earlier, for

⁸⁸ These are also the ages stipulated for eligibility to receive an adult share of land, comprising a half *gibri*.

example, was betrothed at the age of 12, and her mother reported that she would marry the following year, at age 13. When asked how this would be possible, considering the rules of the *serit*, the girl's mother explained that, although the marriage would take place, the marriage property would not be formally registered with the *bayto* until the girl had reached 15 years of age. In this way, marriages of young girls, typically involving the exchange of larger amounts of property, take place informally. Members of the *tabiya bayto* appear to turn somewhat of a blind eye to such cases, as long as the marriage age is not excessively young.

However, according to informants, the marriage age for young women in Enda Mariyam has generally risen. This is not only a function of the stipulation of a minimum marriage age in the *serit*; it is also a function of the fact that the logic behind female child marriage is less pressing in the aftermath of institutional reform. Since *risti* has been abolished and the transmission of land rights through children no longer occurs, and since cattle dowry has been formally outlawed, there is less anxiety on the part of the groom's sponsoring household to secure these resources by means of an early betrothal and marriage. Perhaps for this reason, although people in Enda Mariyam initially resisted the new ruling, its benefits are now better understood:

Now, you have to marry a girl who is 15 years. People have adapted to this, and now they appreciate it. Before, when girls married at 8 or 9 years, they were often divorced because that is too young. Now, they are 15 years, and they are more mature, so there is less divorce. People say now this is a good system (Yohanis Elifeh, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

The changes in customary law introduced by the TPLF and codified in the *tabiya serit* have had important effects. However, they are not the only factors affecting marriage practice in the present day. In addition and underlying all other reform measures, is land reform.

2.3 Land, Cattle and Marriage Practice

In tandem with promoting women's emancipation through the reform of marriage, the TPLF also aimed to promote women's economic independence through land reform:

Since women were also allowed to own land on a basis of equality with men, the agrarian reform was an important milestone in the liberation of the women of Adi Nebried... Now that they have their own land, they will not be helpless even if they are divorced by their husbands... The equal distribution of land irrespective of sex has given a firm economic basis to all the other reforms carried out by the democratic national struggle led by the TPLF to liberate women (Tekeste Agazi, 1983: 29).

As noted in Chapter 2, the TPLF's land reform differed significantly from the Derg's land reform - and indeed from most other radical land reform programmes aimed at a socialist transformation - insofar as it granted land rights to the individual, rather than the household. As Tekeste Agazi (1983) indicates, this aspect of the TPLF's land reform was specifically intended to promote women's economic autonomy.

Under the Derg, it was mainly male heads of households who gained from land reform. For many Ethiopian women, however, the 1975 Land Reform Proclamation meant a loss of ground (see Davison, 1988: 9). In the north, rights in *rist* land which Amhara women previously enjoyed regardless of marital status were abolished, and replaced by rights in land through the household head. This meant that married women enjoyed only indirect rights to land through their husbands.

Under the TPLF land reform, women's primary rights in land were protected. Further, the new tenure system stipulates that every adult, male and female, is entitled to receive, from the total arable land of the *tabiya*, a half *gibri* "share". For women, this means that not only have their formal rights in land been preserved but they have also gained control over specific plots of land in practice. In this regard, women have control over land independent of marriage or inheritance circumstances for the first time. Women no longer function as vehicles for the transmission of *risti* rights in land. Rather, they receive an adult share of land upon reaching 15 years of age, which is retained into marriage, and through divorce, if it occurs. Although the exact location of a woman's plot or plots may change, her share of available land does not.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ The exception are cases where women have reached 15 years of age but not yet been allocated their adult land share. This is a more generalised problem, however, and not specific to women. The situation of "landless adults" is considered later in the chapter.

The implications of land reform for women have been especially significant with regard to marriage. During the *ancien regime*, marriage and the establishment of an independent household was not an option available to all women. Rather, women from capital-poor households whose sponsors could not afford to provide a cattle dowry faced significant obstacles in contracting a marriage on favourable terms, and often were unable to marry at all. As Besserat, a TPLF woman fighter quoted in Hammond (1989: 38) explains: "If you were a poor peasant and you had daughters, you couldn't marry them off because you didn't have dowries to give them."

According to informants, young women from capital-poor households who were unlikely to be able to marry typically left their villages and migrated to large towns such as Makele or Asmara, where they worked as domestic servants or, in some cases, prostitutes. Alternatively, young women whose lack of a dowry militated against their contracting a *merah kefti* marriage were sometimes forced to accept a *gerdena* marriage arrangement. Whereas *merah kefti* provided for the division of common property in the event of divorce, *gerdena* marriages implied the absence of a woman's rights to any share of property accumulated by the household in the event of divorce. In practice, marriage contracts did not always fit neatly into one category or other, but often varied along a spectrum. As a general rule however, the less property the woman could bring to the marriage, the less "confidence" she had with regard to her rights to, and control over, a share of the household's resources.

Since land reform, women from capital-poor households have a much better chance of contracting a marriage and remaining within a village context. As will be seen later in the chapter, marriage strategies have shifted since the revolution. Gaining access to additional plots of land through marriage has become increasingly important to young men seeking to establish their own, independent households. Consequently, all other factors being equal, women over 15 years of age are now in a roughly commensurate position with regard to marriage because, although not every woman will have cattle to bring to a marriage, every woman will have land. As one informant in Enda Mariyam explained:

In the past, if a woman had a strong family, she could be strong in marriage. Her family could give her cattle and other things to be confident and strong. But if a woman didn't have cattle, she couldn't marry. Her only chance was to live with her parents for a long time, or to go to a town like Makele or Addis

Ababa. But now, the government gave her land, and she can marry. Now, even the poor can be strong in marriage (Tsgae Halifa, farmer's wife, Enda Mariyam).

The fact that "even the poor can be strong in marriage" has important implications. According to informants in Enda Mariyam, out-migration of young women from capital-poor households to the towns has decreased since land reform. Although other factors will inform marriage choices, the absence of cattle is no longer an automatic bar to contracting a favourable marriage.⁹⁰ Rather, as long as a woman has land, she can "compete" in the marriage market. In this regard, the TPLF land reform served to enhance the opportunity for poor women to establish their own households through marriage. Further, since *gerdena* marriages have been formally abolished, poor women are no longer necessarily forced to accept an unfavourable marriage contract.

As will be seen further below, the general perception that women have gained "strength" since the implementation of TPLF reforms is supported by factors linked to the prevalence of divorce.

3. Divorce

Having examined some of the implications of institutional reform for marriage, it is possible to turn to the question of divorce. Divorce among the Tigray is common. Out of all recorded marriages among a sample population in Enda Mariyam for which one partner was still living, 37% ended in divorce. In Bauer's village of Hareyna, 45% of all recorded marriages from which one partner was still living ended in divorce (Bauer, 1977: 127). A high rate of divorce is also noted among the Amhara (see Weissleder, 1967; Pankhurst, 1992; Poluha, 1989).

⁹⁰ In addition to emotional considerations, marriage choices will be informed by the relation between the prospective partners. Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity prohibits marriage to any kin related closer than six generations. In Enda Mariyam, consideration of the "purity" of ancestry of a prospective spouse is also important. Persons known as *gebechere*, meaning they have a blacksmith ancestor, find it more difficult to contract a marriage.

Due to the sharply defined division of labour, divorce is usually followed by remarriage. For men, remarriage is the most common solution to the problem of how to incorporate female labour into the household for food preparation and other tasks in the domestic field. For women, the problem of ploughing labour can be solved in other ways, for example through land rental, and consequently women face less economic imperative to remarry. However, women of childbearing age usually do remarry after divorce. As one woman in Enda Mariyam observed, "It is always better to remarry, in order to get children." Hence, the majority of female-headed households in Enda Mariyam were older women past childbearing age.

As noted earlier, marriage is a civil contract that can be easily broken by either partner. Church ceremonies are mandatory only for priests and deacons. Divorce is initiated when one partner simply walks out of the household to reside elsewhere. Typically, this is the woman. Poluha (1989: 63) notes that, among the Ashena Amhara, women have "culturally respected rights to leave both partner and area." Similarly, Pankhurst (1992) observes that among the Menz Amhara, the majority of divorces are initiated by women. However, Pankhurst also notes that, regardless of who initiates the break up, it will usually be the woman who physically leaves the homestead to reside elsewhere, often in her natal village. As a result, women are forced to take active measures to ensure their portion of divisible property is returned, since, "(in) a virilocal society, the husband's effective control over the home is greater than that of the wife" (Pankhurst, 1992: 117).⁹¹

Informants in Enda Mariyam forwarded a variety of reasons for divorce. The majority were linked to the appropriate roles of each partner in managing a household. In general, women are expected to carry out tasks in the domestic field and to bear children. Men are expected to be successful farmers and livestock managers. The failure of either partner to fulfil role obligations is grounds for divorce:

A good husband gets up early, cares for the livestock, and works well on the land. A good wife always prepares food for her husband, gives him breakfast and dinner, and sends him lunch to eat if he is working in the fields. She also

⁹¹ Pankhurst's study was conducted in a village under government control. As such, it did not experience the same institutional reform as was initiated in TPLF-controlled areas. The extent to which "the husband's effective control over the home" (Pankhurst, 1992: 117) has been undermined by TPLF reform is an important issue, as will be seen later.

has a fire waiting for him when he comes home. All these things make a *tsbuk hadar* ("good marriage"). The main reason for divorce is that the man or the woman is not doing their job (Kidan Gebre Michael, farmer's wife, Enda Mariyam).

Divorce is also common, say female informants, when a woman has become too weak or ill for childbearing. Both men and women seek children from marriage. Children provide labour for the household and act as a means of support in old age. If a woman is found to be infertile, a man will usually divorce her. The exceptions are cases in which the man himself has grown too old to support the costs of child rearing. In such cases, an older man might seek an older wife, without the expectation of children. This would enable the man to remain living independently, as opposed to residing with one of his children or other kin. Indeed, unless an older man has a daughter or other female kin who agree to live with him - a rare scenario, since most females leave to establish their own households - he is usually forced to relinquish his status as household head and become a member of another household in old age. Older women, on the other hand, see little advantage in remarriage once they are past childbearing age. As one woman observed:

Why should a woman stay married if she doesn't get any benefit from it? Hadash stays married to Wolde Meliel, but she is too old to have children now. So, she is like a servant to him. It's better for her to be alone. Then she won't have to work so hard, preparing special food. She can do simple things for herself (Alem Tshai Raphael, female head of household, Enda Mariyam).

Although divorce is initiated by one partner simply walking out, finalising the settlement of property can be a long process. In the first instance, *shumagele* (elders) will be called in to attempt to reconcile the couple or, failing that, to determine how the joint property of the couple is to be divided. If the *shumagele* are unable to broker an agreement, the next stage is for the *ferdi bayto* to become involved. In practice, the *ferdi bayto* is often brought in earlier, by one or the other party who believes the designated *shumagele* are unlikely to decide matters in their favour.

Upon divorce, individual property brought to the marriage by each party should be returned, or suitable compensation made, while joint property should be divided equally. What constitutes individual and joint property, respectively, will have been registered with the *ferdi bayto* upon marriage. As lax as most people in Enda Mariyam

are about registering the details of other kinds of agreements with the justice committee, they are nevertheless diligent in registering individual property brought to a marriage.⁹² Weissleder noted a similar diligence among the Amhara, suggesting that, "In some respects, marriage contracts are written with a foreboding of almost certain disaster... they provide inventories by which... respective possessions may be disentangled in case of failure" (Weissleder, 1965: 201). Despite this, disputes often arise as to how a settlement should be made.

If there are children, they may be divided between the two spouses upon divorce. Very young children usually remain with the wife, while those of approximately eight years and above are given the choice. Informants say it is best if girls remain with their mother and boys go with their father. Often, a divorced woman with young children will return to her natal household, where she can share some of the burden of child care. In case of remarriage, the children may remain with their grandparents since, as one informant observed, "A man does not like to raise the children of his wife by another man."

First marriages are highly vulnerable to divorce in the very early stages, before the couple has fully separated from the groom's parental or sponsoring household. In part, this is because divorce at this stage does not involve a division of marital property. Since the household is not yet fully independent, it has not yet acquired its own resources. If divorce occurs at this stage, property is simply returned to the sponsoring households, and the bride returns to her natal household, which she has anyway been visiting on a regular basis.

Once the couple separate, however, and are declared *guji wutsa* ("new housed" or "new hutted"), all property transferred to the couple will be included in a divorce settlement. This renders divorce proceedings more complex; hence, the tendency towards divorce is lessened. At the same time, the new household will be struggling to stabilise economically. Even when parents or sponsors have been generous in

⁹² I heard of one case in the village where a man tried to prevent the registration of property upon his marriage by telling his new wife, in effect, "This is between you and me only." His new wife suspected, rightly as it turned out, that this man hoped to take a large part of her property, including cattle and grain, away with him in case of divorce. After going herself to the *ferdi bayto* to register her and her husband's property correctly, she divorced him.

providing resources, the conditions of Tigray production place considerable pressure on the newly-independent household.

Nevertheless, once the household is firmly established, and children have been born, the likelihood of divorce recedes. Indeed, divorce is frowned upon when the couple have established a solid basis for success as a household enterprise: that is, when they have build more than one dwelling in their compound, own some livestock, have young children, and are producing good crops. At this stage, young households are encouraged to name a household saint who they will henceforth honour on a monthly basis, a ritual called *mezeker* that is believed to solidify and protect the marriage.

Although divorce among older couples is less common, it does occur. A man may divorce a wife of 30 years to remarry a younger woman in an effort to produce more children, and a woman may divorce her husband if she herself is past childbearing years, to reduce her labour burden.

The fact that there are pressures on the household at each stage of its developmental cycle means that divorce is always a possibility and frequently an actuality, followed in most cases by remarriage. Pankhurst (1992: 118) calls this instability "careering through marriage". Bauer (1977: 79) calls the affinal relationship "brittle" and notes that in Haryana the mean duration of marriages is little more than 12 years. Weissleder (1974: 84) observes that:

... socio-economic pressures and forces urge all marriages toward and past the divorce point, that is, the threshold where the rationale of marriage terminates. The incidence of divorce and remarriage is therefore high throughout the society.

Fieldwork in Enda Mariyam confirmed that a high incidence of divorce and remarriage is still a characteristic feature of Tigray social organisation. The mean duration of marriages recorded during a household survey was 14 years, a figure roughly commensurate to that recorded by Bauer in the late 1960s.

At the same time, all informants in Enda Mariyam whom I questioned on the topic said that the frequency of divorce has increased. In the following section, possible indications of a change in the frequency of divorce are considered.

3.1 A Changing Frequency of Divorce?

When asked about differences in the divorce rate in present-day marriage as compared to the past, informants provided the following kinds of comments:

Before, a husband could beat his wife. If he hit her, she would go home to her parents, but her parents would tell her not to be a child. They would send her back to her husband. But now, the husband is not allowed to beat his wife. If he beats her, she can divorce him. Before, if she asked for divorce he would beat her. But now he can't. Now, a woman can say "no" to her husband, and divorce him easily (Alem Abai, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

In the past, marriage was strong. It was not easy to divorce. The *shumagele* and the parents had more influence. In the past, even if the wife is unhappy she has to stay and pretend things are fine. But now, the wife can leave anytime, even if there is a small problem. After the TPLF came, young people are just doing what they want. They can divorce easily, by a simple method (Kidān Gebre Michael, farmer's wife, Enda Mariyam).

In the past it was necessary for a girl to marry, even if she is crying all the time. Now, women marry as adults. Wives are more equal now under the TPLF's law. They can say and do what they like. Now, women can refuse anything they don't want, and there is more divorce (Mebratu Kidān, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

As these comments indicate, people in Enda Mariyam believe that divorce occurs more frequently now, mainly as a consequence of the "TPLF's law": that is, the revised *serit*. These laws are seen, especially by some older informants, to have undermined the "strength" of marriage and increased the tendency to divorce. The stipulation of a minimum marriage age for women of 15 years, the right of women to choose their own marriage partners, and the prohibition against physical abuse within marriage have indeed all served to weaken traditional structures of authority over women. That women now have a greater ability to "say and do what they like" is considered a key factor contributing to a higher divorce rate.

The perception that greater autonomy for women in traditional society leads to a higher divorce rate is not unique to residents of Enda Mariyam. Pankhurst (1992: 118) suggests that a high divorce rate may be interpreted as evidence of women's power

to leave an unsatisfactory marriage. Studies carried out in countries experiencing a socialist transformation, where the emancipation of women is an explicit part of the political agenda, link an increased frequency of divorce to an increased independence of women from the patriarchal family (see Stacy, 1983).⁹³

As noted earlier, weakening the authority of the patriarchal family was an aim of the TPLF's programme of social transformation. One of the mechanisms for implementing this aim was the establishment of the local justice committee, or *ferdi bayto*, with authority to enforce the *serit* at *tabiya* level. The *ferdi bayto* formally replaced the pre-revolutionary position of the *atbiya danya*, or local judge appointed by the imperial Ministry of Justice under Haile Selassie's government. In contrast, *ferdi bayto* are now elected by *tabiya* residents. Appeals against decisions of the *ferdi bayto* are taken to the next level of courts, the wereda *ferdi bayto*. Since this involves a higher cost, including accommodation in the town of Hagre Selam, most people in Enda Mariyam accept the ruling of the *tabiya ferdi bayto*.

During the imperial period, divorce settlements were either negotiated through *shumagele* or if there was a failure to reach agreement, through the *atbiya danya*. *Shumagele* were chosen by both parties to the divorce, from among influential kin or friends of both sides. Usually, two or three from each side gathered. In the course of negotiations, the status of *shumagele* gathered by either side was highly influential in the outcome of the settlement. According to informants, unless a woman had the backing of powerful kin, she frequently lost out in the division of property upon divorce:

In the past, if there was divorce a woman had to leave the house, and she could take only what the *shumagele* gave her. She couldn't argue. Mostly women in the past didn't argue, because they were weak. They followed the decision of the *shumagele*. Maybe if there was a strong woman who had a strong family, she could argue, and take the case to the *chika shum* (parish headman), but this was rare (Mebratu Kidan, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

⁹³ On the other hand, Molyneux (1984: 73) notes that in "advanced socialist countries", efforts are made by mass organisations, state and party officials to resolve domestic conflicts and prevent the dissolution of marriage through divorce.

Such an unequal division of property was, in fact, in violation of customary rights under both *merah kefti* and *birkinet* marriage contracts, which both provided for an equal division of joint property, with the exception of land, upon divorce. As Bauer (1977: 134) observes:

Throughout the marriage an accounting is kept of the community and personal property so that, should a divorce take place, only the community property will be divided and the personal property remain in the hands of its original owner.

Weissleder (1974: 71) notes similar customary rights among the Amhara of Ankober:

The customary formula at Ankober stipulates that each spouse is to take out of the marriage what he or she brought into it, plus half of any gain due to common effort, according to the equitable principle of *kapte ba kaptesh*, the gain of one is the gain of the other.

Nevertheless, informants say that *shumagele* almost always decided upon a division of property that favoured the man. As a TPLF woman fighter, quoted in Hammond (1989: 95), explains, "Before, the man kept everything including the dowry, except for a pittance, except for a few *birr*."

The establishment of locally-based justice committees with responsibility for enforcing the rules of the *serit*, undermined traditional structures of control over divorce proceedings. In particular, a gathering of *shumagele* is no longer the single most important forum in which divorce settlements are negotiated. Although *shumagele* still retain significant moral legitimacy as "wise men" who resolve conflicts, their authority to decide on issues of property settlement in divorce is only legitimate insofar as both parties agree to abide by their decisions. Otherwise, and in many cases, settlements are taken to the *ferdi bayto*. Indeed, the fact that both structures now exist side-by-side provides individuals with considerable room for manoeuvre, since a claimant can go first to one then the other by way of negotiating a settlement of maximum benefit to themselves.

For women in particular, the existence of the *ferdi bayto* provides an impartial mechanism for brokering and, if necessary, enforcing a divorce settlement of commensurate benefit to both spouses, as stipulated in the *serit*. According to a

former *ferdi bayto* member in Enda Mariyam, the existence of this mechanism gives women greater confidence than reliance on the *shumagele* alone:

If there is divorce, a woman can get equal property. If she doesn't, she can go to the *bayto*. The *bayto* will ask the husband for her property. In the past, she had to take what the *shumagele* gave her. But now she has confidence that the *bayto* will ask for her (Mebratu Kidan, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

Has this confidence increased the frequency of divorce? It is possible to say, at least, that the presence of the *ferdi bayto* has increased the ability of women to achieve an equitable divorce settlement, as compared with the imperial period. As Barnes (1967) notes, however, there is a difference between the ability or interest to divorce in a given society, and its actual rate of occurrence.

Unfortunately, the available quantitative data provides little in the way of clarification. As noted earlier, Bauer found that 45% of marriages contracted in Hareyna for which one partner was still living ended in divorce (see Bauer, 1977: 126). The comparable figure for Enda Mariyam is 37% (as a percentage of all marriages contracted among a sample population for which one partner is still living).

We can refine this further and calculate a divorce frequency for both villages, using "the number of marriages ended in divorce as a percentage of all marriages except those that have ended in death" (Barnes, 1967: 61). Barnes (1967) suggests this calculation is a more satisfactory way of representing the frequency of divorce in a given society, because it reduces the effect of mortality on the ratio. Using this method, we then arrive at a figure for divorce frequency in Hareyna of 25.7% (Bauer, 1977: 126), and in Enda Mariyam of 46%. This would seem to confirm informant reports that the rate of divorce is increasing. However, many of the marriages recorded during fieldwork in Enda Mariyam were contracted prior to land reform. Consequently, it is not possible to confidently use these percentages as proof of a change in divorce frequency one way or the other.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ A simple comparison of the status of surveyed adults in both villages is theoretically possible - i.e. the percentage that were married, divorced or widowed at the time of interview. However, since divorce is quickly followed by remarriage, this would tell us little about divorce frequencies.

In the end, without reliable quantitative data, it is not possible to make definitive statements about whether and how the frequency of divorce has changed since the advent of institutional reform. Informant statements that divorce is more frequent now, as a consequence of "the TPLF's law", should be viewed, at least in part, through the filter of attitudes toward the present political system. As shown by Bauer and others, marital instability and a high divorce rate are characteristic of the northern highland peasantry. For those villagers who regret the decline of traditional institutional forms, this feature of the social landscape may be consciously or unconsciously exaggerated as a means of drawing a moral distinction between past and present.

In light of this, determining the precise frequency of divorce becomes less important than understanding how institutional reform has affected decision-making with regard to divorce. It is here also that we can look for further clues as to changes in the status of women. These issues are considered in the next section.

3.2 Land, Houses, and Divorce Practices

As noted earlier, property registered upon marriage falls into two broad categories: individual property, belonging to either the husband or wife, and the joint or common property of the marriage. Upon divorce, the *ferdi bayto* or *shumagele*, or sometimes both working together, establish the basis for a division of joint property.

Since joint property must be divided equally, this can be a complex undertaking, requiring the valuation of different ages and types of livestock, different kinds and amounts of grain, and stored straw, if any. The exact value of these items will also change, depending upon last season's harvest and prospects for next season's. In addition, while it is expected that the woman will take away all of the tools associated with the domestic sphere, and the man will take all agricultural and livestock-related items, this division must also be judged as equivalent in value.

In the pre-revolutionary period, livestock, grain, straw, and household implements were the main items considered to be part of the joint property of the marriage, and hence liable to division upon divorce. Since institutional reform under the TPLF, however, an additional item has been added; namely, the homestead itself, meaning

the various dwellings within the household compound. Although frequently overlooked in discussions of women's changing rights in property since the revolution, this seemingly minor reform of customary practice has had important implications.

During the *ancien regime*, the homestead always remained the property of the man upon divorce. According to informants, this made sense for a number of reasons. First, since most women move to the village of their husbands upon marriage, but return to their natal village upon divorce, a woman does not need her former dwellings to reside in, whereas a man, who remains in the village, does. Further, no man would voluntarily choose to live in a house built by another man; rather every man seeks to build his own houses. Hence, if a woman did choose to remain living in her former homestead she could not hope to remarry. Finally, a homestead with several dwellings in the compound represents a significant capital investment. Typically, it takes up to ten years to establish the basic dwellings in a compound, including a cooking hut (*da mogogo*), living house (*af gebela*), grain storage area (*hidmo*), silo hut for straw storage (*da haser*), and, if the household has prospered, an additional one or two dwellings (*sekela* or *debr*) for guests. To have managed a household successfully enough to have built all of these dwellings marks a man out for respect in the village. If they are lost, a man would find it very difficult to acquire the land and the resources necessary to rebuild elsewhere on a commensurate scale.

By custom, however, it was recognised that the wife made an equal contribution to the success of the household and the building of the homestead. In consequence, a husband was obliged, upon divorce, to pay his wife a *gimgimat*, or compensation - usually in cash - of half the value of all the dwellings in the compound. In this way, men retained control of the homestead, which enabled them to remarry. The valuation itself was carried out by *shumagele*. As was the case with other aspects of a divorce settlement, the power of the woman involved, and the character and position of the *shumagele*, were often decisive in determining what she actually received as *gimgimat*, or indeed, whether she received it at all.

In the new *serit*, however, it is stipulated that in case the couple have only one dwelling in their compound, the disposition of that dwelling upon divorce will be carried out by lottery, with compensation paid to the loser for half the value of the dwelling. In other words, the wife has a fifty-fifty chance of obtaining control of the dwelling, and

living there as the owner of the homestead.

As an aside, it is interesting to speculate here why only one house was specified in the *serit*. Given that there was strong resistance, in Enda Mariyam at least, to the introduction of this reform measure, it may be that a single dwelling represents a compromise between what TPLF cadres ideally wanted, and what *tabiya* residents were prepared to adopt. Certainly, it would be easier for a man to recover from losing a single-dwelling homestead upon divorce, than losing a well-established homestead with many dwellings. Also, a single-dwelling compound is likely to belong to a younger man, with more years ahead to build another homestead elsewhere in the village.

At the same time, however, the definition of a "single dwelling" is ambiguous. Most households start out with a *hidmo*, used as cooking area, sleeping area and grain storage all in one. The next dwelling to be build is an *af gebela*, essentially an extension onto a *hidmo*, which represents a major leap forward in circumstance, since the grain storage and cooking area can now be separated from the sleeping and living area. Hence, a "single dwelling" may, in fact, represent a significant amount of building and improvements. Moreover, it is not only the dwelling that is in consideration but also the compound itself, including its location, fencing, and the value of any trees on the compound's land.

According to informants, although this rule is codified in the *serit*, in general most people prefer to follow traditional practice with regard to the homestead. That is, *shumagele* agree to the value of the dwelling or dwellings in the compound, and half of this amount is paid to the wife as *gimgimat*, with the husband retaining ownership. As long as the matter is settled with *shumagele*, and all parties appear satisfied, the *ferdi bayto* prefers not to intervene.

In some cases, however, the wife will refuse to accept this method of settlement and will take her case to the *ferdi bayto*. This occurred during the first year of fieldwork, in the midst of an acrimonious divorce proceeding between a husband and wife resident in Endabazbanom neighbourhood. The marriage was some five years old at the time of the divorce, and the dwelling in question was a *hidmo* with *af gebela*, in a very desirable compound on top of a small hill, located close to both wood and farm land. The woman, Algenesh Kidan, did not want the divorce, which was initiated by ex-

husband, Gaysay Tekien. As part of a strategy to encourage Gaysay to change his mind, Algenesh refused to accept a *gimgimat* for their homestead and instead initiated proceedings for a lottery to be held by the *ferdi bayto*. Algenesh won the lottery, obtained the homestead, and Gaysay was forced to move into his parental household. The *ferdi bayto* then set the amount of compensation that she should pay, in cash, to Gaysay.

This event provoked much discontent in the neighbourhood, and many people expressed their uneasiness at the way the matter was settled. First, people noted that although Gaysay stored his grain separately, and hence did not have to follow his father's orders, he had nevertheless been "brought low" by returning to live in his father's household. Second, everyone dreaded the possibility of Algenesh bringing a new husband to the homestead, which would almost certainly provoke conflict, if not physical violence between this man and Gaysay. As one informant noted, "Gaysay may try and kill him." Third, Gaysay himself was prevented from remarriage as long as he lived in his parental household.

Although he claimed he would begin looking for land to build another house, in fact Gaysay never fully accepted the *bayto*'s decision.⁹⁵ In particular, he refused to accept the money offered by Algenesh as compensation. The situation continued to smoulder for nearly a year and a half, until Gaysay eventually decided to return to Algenesh and live once again as husband and wife in his own compound.

This case points to the significant implications of this particular facet of institutional reform. For the first time, it is possible for a woman to gain control over the homestead in a manner that places the man at a considerable, and rather public, disadvantage. In this case, Gaysay solved his problem by remarriage to his former wife, but in other circumstances such a neat solution may not be possible. The problems associated with this change from customary practice are still debated in Enda Mariyam. As one informant explained:

⁹⁵ Even assuming he agreed, Gaysay would have found it difficult to obtain the land to build another house. A freeze on new land being set aside for homestead construction was enacted by the *tabiya bayto* in June of 1994 as a temporary measure, to ensure that no additional farm land was lost. This followed the construction of the new road through the area. The freeze was still in effect at the time I left the village, in early 1995.

We agreed with many things the *Woyane* (TPLF) brought. Maybe we resisted at first, but then we saw they were good. But this thing, we didn't agree and still we don't agree. That the house should go to the woman if she wins the lottery is not appropriate for our culture. How can a husband come to another man's house? There will be conflict. How can a divorced man get land to build a new house? We will always argue against this thing (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

The potential disadvantage that may accrue to men in case of divorce is not limited to the loss of the homestead, however. It also includes, automatically, the loss of half the household's land. This is because, as outlined above, a woman takes her half *gibri* share with her upon divorce. Particularly in situations where the women's share of the landholding is of high quality, this can mean a substantial decline in income from crop production for the man.

The fact that women take their land with them in the event of divorce has also enhanced the "confidence" with which women face divorce, because their ability to live independently is better assured. As one peasant woman explained:

Land is useful in divorce. If we own land and property we cannot be forced to live with a man. Now, women are not afraid to leave their husbands. We can feed ourselves (quoted in TPLF, 1988b: 16).

In a context where the basic land allocation is relatively fixed, and where the cost of expanding one's land area through rental has risen, the fact that women can take their land with them in case of divorce has a significant economic impact on men. This, combined with the potential loss of the homestead, means that men are liable to be much greater "losers" in the context of divorce proceedings than has ever been the case. Commensurate with the extent to which men may lose, women have gained in terms of an enhanced status within marriage:

In the past, the woman had to follow her husband. But now, the man is afraid. He will think, "If I divorce her, she will take her land and maybe also the house." So, he has to look out for her more. Now, the woman is stronger (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

Arguably, it is these mutually reinforcing effects of land reform, changes in customary law concerning marriage and divorce, and the establishment of new judicial

structures, which have had the most significant impact on the status of women in Tigray society. This impact has, however, not been seen in a change in the gender division of labour but rather in the nature of women's circumstances as they "career through marriage" (see Pankhurst, 1992: 118). In a context where the peasant mode of production has remained basically the same, the gender division of labour is not in any case an appropriate place to look for changes in the status of women.

In Tigray, such changes must rather be sought in the various ways institutional reform has enabled women to be "stronger" in the context of marriage and divorce. In a setting where frequent divorce and remarriage are features of the social landscape, this is a significant achievement. To be "stronger" implies, in this context, greater mobility of action and greater autonomy of choice for women as they career through marriage.

4. Separation and Intergeneration Relations

Given the centrality of the household to Tigray social life, the process of household creation through separation from the parental household after marriage warrants attention. Separation implies not only a change in personnel and resources but also the establishment of a new household head, and a concomitant change in the status of intergeneration relationships. In this final section of the chapter, changes in the process of separation as a consequence of institutional reform are considered.

4.1 Prior to Reform

Shanin's (1987: 24) account of the partitioning of household property among Russian peasants in the late 19th century is, in many respects, also apt for rural Tigray:

Within the legal customary framework of "family property", the very notion of *inheritance*, as developed and enacted in non-peasant Russia, failed to appear. The passing of property from generation to generation did not usually await the death of a parent and was legally treated as partitioning of family property between its members. Partitioning (or apportionment, to set up a junior male) corresponded to a considerable extent with the growth of nuclear families and their requests for independence. The head of the household took

the decision (partly defined by custom) as to when exactly to partition his farm or when to make apportionment to a son... His refusal to do so could be, and at times was, challenged before the communal assembly or peasant magistrates. The whole issue was treated not just as a problem of economic expediency but also one of social living and "maturation" in its broadest sense.

In a similar manner to 19th century Russia, the main mechanism for passing on property to junior members of a Tigray household was not inheritance but apportionment, intended to help a junior member establish a new household upon his or her marriage. As noted earlier in the chapter, it was customary for the head of the sponsoring household - usually the father - to give cattle to daughters, and grain and land to sons. Although customary law specified how property should be divided upon the death of an individual, post-mortem inheritance was typically of less significance to junior members than pre-mortem inheritance in the context of marriage.

Also as in 19th century Russia, heads of sponsoring households in Tigray controlled the process of junior members' separation to become *guji wutsa* ("new housed"). Because a new couple effectively separated from the groom's sponsoring household, such control was more pronounced in the case of a son than a daughter. According to Bauer (1973), the process of separation might take up to several years. Normally, in the period directly after the marriage ceremony, a new couple is almost wholly dependent on the groom's household. Livestock pledged to the new couple are kept together with the groom's father's herd, and grain pledged to the new couple is mixed with the groom's household's grain supply. This situation is known as *hade mugogo*, or "one cooking house", which illustrates the fact that the new couple lack the ability to prepare food independently and are fed by the groom's household.

This situation changed gradually as various resources and tasks were hived off from the parental household to the new couple. Eventually, the new couple's livestock were separated from the larger herd, their grain supply divided off and stored separately. The couple then physically separated to move into their own dwelling hut, typically still located in the parental household's compound, until such time as they were allocated land to establish a compound of their own. Once the grain supply was separated, the couple were declared by everyone in the neighbourhood to be *guji wutsa*; they now constituted a distinct household.

As noted earlier, customary practice required that a son's parental household equip him, upon separation, with one-third (*siso*) of its grain supply. The amount of grain a *guji wutsa* couple obtained in this way was often critical to its ability to survive the first difficult year of independence. This is because the new household was defined by its ability to prepare its own food, from its own stored grain. Although the new household might also have received some *risti* land, until the following harvest season this land would not assist in enabling it to eat.⁹⁶ Hence, a father who violated customary practice by giving less than one-third of his grain to a son was severely criticised.

With regard to *risti*, although there was no firm requirement for a father to transfer land upon his son's marriage, many in fact did so. By custom, land transfers were also expected to also follow the one-third rule. In practice, however, the actual amount of land transferred to a son varied from household to household, depending on the father's land resources and generosity. As one man explained:

In the past, a father chose some of his land to set aside. He would say, "This is for guests." That land stayed with him. If he was selfish, he would make this the best quality land. After that, the son took one-third of the remainder. This was not by *serit* but by our culture. Even today, most people follow this (Mebratu Kidan, farmer, Enda Mariyam)

The amount of land provided, after an amount had been set aside "for guests", was not only dependent on the father's generosity. It was also influenced by the number of sons in the household, and the amount of land available to the parental household in the first place. In some cases, a household had enough *risti* land to provide a viable size portion to all sons in a households; more typically, however, a father could endow only the oldest son with land. On the other hand, the relatively low cost of land rental in the pre-reform era meant that this was less of a penalty for a new household than might otherwise be the case. As Bauer (1973) notes, a majority of households in Hareyna cultivated rented land in the initial period after their separation.

Fathers also retained control over the timing of the separation process. Just as Shanin (1987: 24) observes for the Russia peasantry, the process of separation in Tigray was not only a question of resources; it was also a question of establishing a

⁹⁶ For the same reason, however, most separations occur just prior to the harvest.

particular kind of social adult -a household head. This required, in the Tigray setting, that the son to be ready to take on responsibility for managing a viable household enterprise, including tasks in the production sphere. The wife, for her part, must be ready to manage all tasks associated with the domestic sphere. Although sons were typically both ready and eager to take on these responsibilities, wives were often young girls - and in some cases very young girls. As a result, the head of the son's household would usually consult with the head of the daughter-in-law's household, to determine together the appropriate time for the couple to become *guji wutsa*.

Economic considerations are, however, never far away from household decision-making in Tigray and also played a role in how fathers managed the separation process. Although sons were anxious to establish their own households, fathers often sought to retain the labour of their sons within their own households for as long as possible. As noted earlier, a son's sponsoring household gained the benefit of both cattle and the labour of a daughter-in-law upon his marriage. Once a son separated, however, the sponsoring household was not only deprived of these temporary gains but also of some portion of grain and *risti* land, as well as the son's labour on a permanent basis. While many sons continued to help their fathers with agricultural tasks after they were *guji wutsa*, they were no longer obliged to do so.

Given this, many fathers sought to delay the process of separation. This was done, initially, by procrastinating in finding a suitable bride and then stretching out the process of betrothal through lengthy negotiations on property transfer with the bride's household. Since the head of the household sponsoring the son's marriage controlled the selection of the bride, there was little sons could do to hasten this process.⁹⁷ Once the marriage had taken place, a father might further procrastinate by slowing the pace at which the apportionment of resources occurred.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ According to informants, a son anxious to separate from a procrastinating father could, as a last resort, decide to abduct a young girl for his bride. If this girl became pregnant, the households on both sides would be forced to recognise a *de facto* marriage. Informants suggest this was not a common practice, however, since a father was then released from the obligation to apportion any property to the son.

⁹⁸ Fathers could not delay indefinitely, however. A son could, if necessary, call upon *shumagele* to put pressure on his father. Alternatively, members of the local clergy could be called in by the village at large to censure the father. A son's rights to resources upon separation were also, according to informants, liable to enforcement by the *atbiya danya*, or local magistrate.

In consequence, the process of becoming *guji wutsa* was fraught with tensions between father and son. Informants in Enda Mariyam illustrate this by quoting a saying, which can be translated as: "You love your son when he is born, but you don't love him when he separates." Bauer (1977: 120) makes a similar observation:

Fathers... generally wish to retain their sons or daughters within their households. The larger unit is economically more stable, having a larger "portfolio" and, in addition, more political clout than a smaller one. The son, for his part, tends to wish to get out from under the authority of his father and begin his career, establishing his own name in the community. The initial separation into *haddis gujjiyussa* is known for the bad feelings it causes between father and son.

Underlying these considerations was also the fact that, upon separation, the relationship between father and son shifted from that of *azazi-tazazi* (one who gives the orders and one obliged to obey the orders) to that of two heads of independent households. Upon achieving the status of *guji wutsa*, a son obtained the right to speak for himself in parish gatherings, to be invited to celebrations in his own right, to provide gifts to the church in his own name, and to be referred to publically by his own name, rather than as the son of his father. Although a son was always expected to show proper respect and display deferential behaviour to his father, he was no longer required to obey his orders.

4.2 Changes in Separation Since Reform

The process of new household creation through separation did not figure as a specific target of intervention for TPLF reforms. Most measures were, rather, directed toward the position of women. There are, nevertheless, some references to separation in the *tabiya serit* of Enda Mariyam. They include that a son who has provided service to his parental household should receive something from that household upon his marriage; otherwise, if the household refuses, the son can bring the case to the *ferdi bayto*. This constitutes more of an updating of customary practice than a reform *per se*. Additionally, a son is not allowed to claim property from his parental household if the pledges of property made at the time of his marriage have not been registered with the *bayto*.

Apart from this, there is little else in the *serit* concerning separation. According to informants, most people in the village still follow the principle of a one-third division of grain to the son upon his separation. In many respects, the process of separation is carried out in more or less the same manner as in the pre-revolutionary period.

It was not reform of separation practice itself that was to have the most important implications for becoming *guji wutsa* but the new land tenure system. To understand what these implications are, it is necessary to consider how land reform has affected marriage strategies in general, especially for young men.

It was probably the case that young men in Bauer's time stood together, as they do in Enda Mariyam today, to gossip about which girls are from rich households, how much cattle they have, and what response their fathers would meet in approaching their households for marriage. Since the implementation of land reform however, there has been a definite shift in emphasis of these discussions away from cattle and toward land. Whereas in the past, the potential cattle dowry a girl might bring was considered to be the most important factor in her desirability as a wife, now it is the quality, size, and location of her land:

In the past, when a man wants to marry, the first question he asks about the woman is, "Does she have cattle?" But now, the first question is "Does she have land?" After that, they may ask about cattle. Now, the man always asks about the woman's land, but in the past there was no such thing (Yohanis Elifeh, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

A key reason for this is the shortage of land available for young men generally. As noted in Chapter 3, there are some men and women resident in their parental households who have reached the legal age of adulthood but not yet received an adult half *gibri* share of land. Indeed, some 16% of surveyed households in both Enda Mariyam and Tegula had such a "landless adult" in residence.⁹⁹ Whereas, during Bauer's time, a young man could establish his own household without receiving any land and arrange to cultivate plots through rental agreements, the terms of land rental today make this a more expensive undertaking. Often, "landless adults" remain

⁹⁹ See Appendix 8, Section 5.

dependent on their parental households until such time as they can gain access to land through an interim allocation, a favourable rental agreement, or - more commonly - marriage. For young men (as well as young women) seeking to establish their own households, marriage to a partner with an adult land share, especially of good quality, is a way out of the dilemma of continued dependence upon a parental household.

In addition, some young men do have a half *gibri* share of land. That a man has been allocated a half *gibri* share does not indicate that he heads his own household, but only that he was the minimum age or older at the time of the last distribution. However, if a young man has not yet separated from his parental household, this half *gibri* share will enable him to obtain enough grain to establish his own household upon marriage. This is irrespective of what his father decides. In effect, land reform has, in some cases, automatically granted adult sons what used to be the exclusive prerogative of the father: namely, an adequate amount of resources to launch an independent household.

This was illustrated by the case of Tsgai Abraha, a young man in Endabazbanom living with his parental household. Tsgai had been married once before, and become *guji wutsa*, but as his divorce followed almost immediately afterward, he remixed his grain supply with that of his father's household supply. By the time of his second marriage, to Aragash Berhan, Tsgai had received an adult allocation of land. Because he had remixed his grain with his parental household and was thus under the authority of his father, this land was farmed as part of the total household holding, according to his father's directions.

Shortly after his marriage, in April, Tsgai began to think of separation. Tensions quickly developed, however, when it became apparent that Tsgai hoped, in the coming planting season, to farm his own land share independently and retain the crop and straw harvest from this land to launch his new household. His father, however, was not anxious to lose Tsgai's ploughing labour that year. He insisted that Tsgai separate with a one-third division of the total grain harvest of all the plots held by the household. This would require Tsgai to work all his father's land, not just his own share. The situation became increasingly difficult, and *shumagele* were called in to mediate.

The fact that Tsgai threatened to separate without his father's blessing, by virtue of the grain he could obtain from his own landholding, is a new development in the village since land reform. As one observer in the village explained:

It is a new thing since the *Woyane* (TPLF) to separate like this. Tsgai has a half *gibri* of land, so he can take the grain from this land and he can separate. But, his father wants him to separate in the old way. His father wants to mix all of the grain, including by this land, and then give one-third to Tsgai. But Tsgai doesn't want this, because he has good quality land. He will get more if he takes by himself, from his half *gibri*. Also, he is afraid his father will cheat him. Aragash Berhan's father also wants the separation in this way, but Tsgai's father opposes it. So, if a man does not have a half *gibri*, he will take one-third grain from his father. But if he is like Tsgai, he can keep the harvest from his own land and separate in this way (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

In principle, young men like Tsgai who have an adult allocation of land have the ability to separate from their parental household regardless of the wishes of their fathers. Even if they do not have a half *gibri* land share themselves, their wives might, in which case they may again be in a position to separate. This has further encouraged young men to look out for the size, location, and quality of land of a prospective bride. In ideal circumstances, both the bride and the groom have a half *gibri* share, meaning that together they have the maximum landholding they will ever be allocated under the present system, until the birth of children. Even if this particular scenario is not realised, land reform has nevertheless enhanced the autonomy of young men in the context of separation.

Though significant, this autonomy should not be overstated. The customary rule of obedience to one's father is still extremely potent in Enda Mariyam, and a young man who blatantly disregards the wishes of his father upon separation will be criticised by the community at large. Further, a son will not only require grain to separate. He will also need agricultural implements, including a plough, as well as continued support if he is to survive the first difficult years of a new household's existence. Hence, it is rare that a son will initiate a separation in such a way as to alienate his father, and his father's household, completely. In the case of Tsgai, fear of his father making good on a threat to pronounce a *mergem*, or curse, upon his son led Tsgai to eventually

separate according to his father's wishes. In return for his son's obedience, Tsgai's father provided a somewhat more generous portion of his grain supply than expected.

Nevertheless, more young men now have an enhanced ability, if they so choose, to determine the manner and timing of their separation from the parental household. This, together with the fact that young men are increasingly involved in the choice of their first marriage partner, has provided for a greater degree of independence of the younger generation from the older.

4.3 Implications

In his study of land reform, Chiari (1996: 9) suggests that the authority of fathers has been weakened as a consequence of the TPLF land reform:

The TPLF land distribution... undermined fathers' authority over their sons, weakening the economic dependence of the latter on the former. Through acquisition of autonomous land rights, young adult sons and daughters did not have to base their marriage and maintenance upon their fathers' willingness to freely allocate part of their *risti* land, or to rent land to them.

Similarly, this section has pointed to ways in which young adults now have a greater capacity to assert their autonomy during the process of becoming *guji wutsa*. Because this process throws into sharp relief the relationship between senior and junior males as they divide resources within the same household, the discussion has focused on fathers and sons. Nevertheless, the implication of an increased autonomy applies to both young men and young women. During the "liminal" phase between the marriage and separation, a new wife is in a vulnerable position. She is working under the direction of her mother-in-law, a situation considered to be rife with potential conflict. Her parental household is therefore anxious for her to remove to her own household as soon as possible. As a result, a new wife's parental household will push for a speedy separation. This push provides additional impetus for sons to challenge their fathers' authority and push for an early autonomy.

In this regard, institutional reform has boosted the desire of young men and women to establish their own households and provided them with access to the productive

resources that are a necessary starting point for doing so. One implication of this is that, whereas first-marriage ages for women have risen, there has been a decrease in the age of first marriage for men. As one informant explained:

In the past, a man would not marry until he was 25 or 26 years old. This is because a son could not find a wife for himself; he had to rely on his father. So, the father could delay finding a wife for his son if he wanted the son to stay and work for him. But now, a son will say to his father, "Hurry and find me a wife." They want to be independent sooner. Now the son will have a half *gibri* of their own land, and they can be independent. Even if they only have a quarter *gibri*, they can find a wife with her own land. They are in a hurry to have their own household (Yohanis Elifeh, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

These changes are occurring in the context of an overall shift in the nature of wealth differentiation within the village. As Chapter 4 has shown, the "big man" of the village setting, with a large compound and many dwellings, a large labour force, and an accumulation of significant land and livestock resources, has virtually disappeared. So too has the large number of very poor households, with unviably small landholdings and few, or more typically, no livestock. Rather, both land and livestock resources have levelled out in the aftermath of land reform, in terms of the pattern of distribution between households.

What this suggests is that more households are in a position to equip their sons and daughters upon first marriage than was previously the case. At the same time, the package of "equipment" such households can provide has, on average, probably become smaller. As suggested earlier in the chapter, large gifts of cattle to daughters are now much less common, and the case of Gebre Kidan Tekie was noted as the exception rather than rule. Similarly, the amount of grain that a rich father can provide to his son has shrunk, commensurate with the general levelling down in wealth of households at the wealthiest end of the spectrum. The fewer resources a new household has at its inception, however, the greater the challenges it faces in stabilising economically and the greater risk of failure.

In his study of Hareyna households, Bauer (1977) notes the contradiction between the ideal of a large, independent household capable of supporting a substantial number of people and thus possessing a large labour force, and the reality of young members splitting off to establish their own household units. In Enda Mariyam, the

goal of establishing an independent household that will grow and prosper has not changed since the advent of institutional reform. In many respects, it has become an easier goal to embark upon. While the goal of establishing an independent household has become easier to initiate, however, it has not become easier to sustain. In this regard, the contradiction Bauer highlights, between the ideal and the reality of household development may be increasing. That is, it may be that more new households are failing more often. If true, this may be a contributing factor to an increased incidence - if any - of divorce and remarriage. In the absence of further empirical study, however, such propositions can only be speculative.

What does appear clear is that, in Enda Mariyam, tensions between fathers and sons in the context of separation feed into larger tensions between generations thrown up in the aftermath of institutional reform. This is illustrated in comments offered by older informants:

In the past, there were good sons who obeyed their father's orders and bad sons who didn't, and it is the same now. But there is also a change since the *Woyane* (TPLF). Now, the young don't have respect for their elders. In the past this respect was strong, but it is not strong now (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

Tensions between generations are considered in the next chapter, in the course of a discussion of the implications of institutional reform for religious practice in the village.

CHAPTER 6 - REFORM AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

1. Introduction

Thus far, this thesis has concentrated on the effects of land reform on the farm economy of Enda Mariyam, the nature of wealth and social stratification in the village, and the dynamics of household creation, development, and collapse. In this chapter, a final aspect of land reform will be explored - namely, the implications for local religious practice.

At first glance, the relationship between land reform and religious practice may seem a tenuous one. Indeed, the literature on land reform elsewhere in Ethiopia rarely mentions religious practice, except in terms of background descriptions of the *ancien regime*. However, in the ox-plough regions of the northern highlands, the local practice of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity has a very important bearing on agricultural production and land use, not least because it serves to regulate agricultural labour. The chapter considers how changes in the local economy precipitated by land reform have affected the capacity of individuals to follow "traditional" religious practice, as well as the power of the Church to enforce that practice in a changed institutional setting.

At the same time, the chapter broadens the discussion of revolutionary reform to include other efforts at social transformation on the part of the TPLF. More specifically, these include attempts to modify the nature of local religious practice, and especially the observance of saints' days and other holy days in the Orthodox calendar. These efforts, which constituted part of the TPLF's broader agenda of revolutionary transformation, were aimed at freeing labour to pursue more economically productive activities and hence reduce food insecurity. They have had complex implications that are very much in evidence today. Indeed, a central issue of debate in Enda Mariyam during the second year of fieldwork concerned the consequences of modified religious practice for the well-being of the village.

The incident that sparked this debate is worth describing. In September 1994, a fungal disease destroyed virtually the entire *alkway* (horse bean) crop in Enda Mariyam. Mysteriously, the disease appeared to stop at the boundaries of the *kushet*: the nearby villages of Enda Michael and Mai Woini were not affected. Because it only grows in certain areas, *alkway* fetches a high price in the Hagne Selam market. Hence, it is an important income-earner in the village, as well as an important food source between late September and late-October, when household grain reserves are at their lowest.

This localised disaster was interpreted by some people, including senior clerics of the Mariyam church, as divine punishment for the fact that many farmers in the village had ploughed the previous June during the weeklong religious holiday of Beahl Hamsa. A heated debate ensued over the question of work on holidays, and especially work conducted outside the homestead in the "public" sphere of agriculture. While the specific instance of ploughing on Beahl Hamsa was a starting point, debates quickly expanded to encompass its wider implications.

Broadly speaking, two opposing positions were articulated. The first, taken mainly by older people and prominent members of the clergy, claimed that people in Enda Mariyam had become "weak in religion", and advocated a return to more universal observance of work prohibitions. The second position, taken mainly by younger people and local political administrators, claimed that any "weakness" in religion was due to internal discord within the Mariyam church itself, and that it was up to the individual to make their own choice about whether or not to work on holidays. In addition, the articulation of these opposing positions was itself a source of concern and discussion within the village. As one informant explained:

Now people are confused. This confusion came after the TPLF. Now, some people say we have to follow the old system of religion, but other people say "what is a holiday?" and they are working on these days. In the past, the church had the power over holidays, and the government followed the church's rule. But now, the church has no power as in the past. If you want to work on a holiday, you can work. People are confused because we can say there are two religions now. This is a problem for us. It is a very big problem (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

This comment, and village debates more generally, suggested that religious practice and the pursuit of subsistence livelihoods had somehow come into conflict with one another and that, as a result, "religion" had somehow emerged as a contested area of social life.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the background and character of these contestations. The chapter begins with a normative description of elements of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity as practised in Enda Mariyam. Then, in order to understand how revolutionary reform has affected "traditional" or pre-land reform modes of practice, the chapter provides a brief outline of Ethiopian Orthodoxy in the social world of the late imperial period.

Following this, the chapter describes key reform measures implemented by the TPLF, including those aimed at curbing the power of the church to direct peasant economic practice. The impacts of these measures are then placed in the broader context of a changing political economy in the village as a consequence of land reform, with particular focus on the reduction in number of religious holidays. The final section of the chapter then returns to debates within the village. It describes the operation of different discourses concerning the source of material prosperity in the world and considers an increasingly public disjuncture between the rules of religious observance and the realities of religious practice.

2. Normative Elements of Belief and Practice

Like the vast majority of Tigray peasants, all residents of Enda Mariyam *tabiya* practise Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and all residents of Enda Mariyam *kushet* belong to the parish of the Mariyam church.¹⁰⁰ Tigray religious belief is not wholly bounded by Ethiopian Orthodoxy. It also includes *zar* spirits, the power of the evil eye associated primarily with blacksmiths, and the existence of what Reminick (1975: 27) calls "numerous little devils and trolls that roam the countryside playing malicious

¹⁰⁰ For the purposes of this discussion, "parish" and "village" are used interchangeably. As noted in Chapter 1, a single parish is often co-terminus with a single village (*kushet*), although this is not always or necessarily the case.

pranks." For the purposes of this discussion, however, the focus is on beliefs associated with Ethiopic Christianity, the single "legitimate" religion supported by the emperorship (Reminick, 1975), and the religion practised by the overwhelming majority - 95.5% - of the state's population (Central Statistical Authority, 1995).

Established in the fourth century, Ethiopian Orthodoxy follows the doctrine of Monophysite Christianity, which asserts that Christ has a single nature, partly divine and partly, but subordinately, human (Sykes, 1982). Hoben (1970: 196) describes some of the distinctions between Ethiopian Orthodoxy and Western Christianity:

Western Christian doctrines emphasize the New Testament, the humanity of Christ, the ubiquity of God, and the direct confrontation or even intimacy possible between man and God. Ethiopic Christianity stresses the Old Testament, the divinity of Christ, formalized in adherence to the monophysite doctrine, the remoteness of God, and the necessity of dealing with him through a multitude of hierarchically ordered angelic messengers, agents, and deputies.

The Tigray concept of God is that of an omnipotent but remote and mysterious presence. Because of his imperfections, mortal man is unable to communicate with or know God directly; indeed, the Tigray believe that to inquire too closely into the nature of God is to risk divine retribution. Rather, God is experienced primarily in terms of the consequences of the exercise of his power on earth. Although the seemingly arbitrary expression of that power may be wondered at - in the words of one informant, "we are always worried about God's decisions" - its ultimate purpose can never be comprehended.

While God's purposes on earth cannot be comprehended, his requirements for the faithfulness of mortal man are known. They are set down in the Bible, which encapsulates God's rules for the conduct of human society in accordance with divine will. These rules, in turn, are translated from the Bible to the parish through the ordained clergy of the Ethiopic church, who constitute the terrestrial intermediaries between human beings and heavenly authorities. By following God's rules, people can be reasonably sure that they are, in the words of one farmer, "under God's control." Conversely, a violation of the rules implies that people have wandered away from God's control, rendering them vulnerable to divine punishment and to the influence of malignant spirits. In this respect, God's rules constitute a prescriptive

framework for human action:

The control exercised by God is regulatory, not dominating...It is a control that orders the world, to the extent that it is ordered, by making certain minimal demands, by establishing certain formal standards - by setting boundaries to legitimate action and by setting punishments for those who willingly transgress these boundaries (Hoben, 1970: 197).

Among the most important of God's rules are prohibitions against the consumption of certain types of food during fasting periods, known as *tsome*. During *tsome*, no animal products should be consumed, including meat, poultry, eggs, oil, and butter. It is possible to observe the onset of a fast from the price pattern in the Hagne Selam market: prices for grain and pulses rise just before a *tsome*.

There are also prohibitions against certain types of work on religious holidays. Holidays comprise both saints' days which operate on a monthly calendar and holy days which occur annually. Annual holy days include national celebrations such as Beahl Ezgiher (Christmas), Timket (Epiphany), Fashiga (Easter) and Fulseta (Assumption), as well as regional holidays such as Beahl Hamsa and Tahmer Mariyam. In addition, each saint has a designated annual day. The total number of holidays in the Ethiopian Orthodox calendar is very large, comprising anywhere from 150 to 250 days in a year (Pankhurst, 1992). In Enda Mariyam, as many as 174 holidays are observed annually; of these, 125 days are dedicated to various saints in the Ethiopian Orthodox pantheon.¹⁰¹

In the Tigray conception of a hierarchically-ordered heaven, saints act as divine intermediaries between human beings and God. They watch over the souls of the faithful and carry their prayers to God. When asked about saints, informants often respond by using the term *wahas* or "guarantor". In the world, a *wahas* is a person called upon to vouch for the good character of an individual in case of crime or injury. In heaven, a saint is believed to fulfill much the same role:

In the world, you have a *wahas*, like a priest or a big man. If you have a problem, you call your *wahas*. The problem can be debt, or fighting, or a problem with the police. The police will say to you, "Bring your *wahas*." And when you die, the saint is the *wahas* for your soul. After you die, your soul will

¹⁰¹ See Appendix 6 for a list of religious holidays in Enda Mariyam.

be judged. When your soul is asked about all the things you did in the world, your saint will be a *wahas* for you at that time. Your saint also helps you in this world. You call the name of your saint before you plough or trade (Ato Kasai, *mikre bet* chairman, Tegula).

Just as an earthly *wahas* requires regular demonstrations of honour and deference to continue in the role of guarantor, so a saint requires the same. Honouring a saint means keeping holy their designated day in both annual and monthly calendars. This requires attending church and refraining from key productive tasks. These include the main tasks of farming such as ploughing and planting, and the main tasks associated with domestic production such as grinding and spinning. To plough or grind on a saint's day is to risk the loss of that saint's protection, both in heaven and on earth.

Specific activities prohibited during holidays include: clearing land, ploughing, sowing, weeding, cutting, winnowing, cutting trees or tree branches, constructing houses, grinding, pounding, and handicraft work. Activities not specifically prohibited include: gathering fuel, fetching water, food preparation (except grinding and pounding), clothes washing, herding, mending fences, and gathering/storing already cut crops. The distinction between these two categories was explained by some informants in terms of those tasks having to do with green or living things (prohibited), and those not having to do with green or living things (permitted). Other informants explained the distinction in terms of those activities that directly increase one's material wealth or one's worldly standing (prohibited), and those that do not (permitted).

Not all saints are honoured equally, however. Rather, each parish observes a slightly different group of saints' days. These include major saints, for whom masses are held in churches throughout Tigray, and "minor" saints for whom masses are held in specific locales. Minor saints achieve local significance as a consequence of events which are interpreted as an expression of their benevolence or displeasure; their days are added to the calendar by agreement of the parish assembly. Bauer (1973: 94) describes how this occurred in Hareyna:

At a meeting I was attending in 1969... Priest Gebre Giyorgis... stood up and enjoined everyone to stop plowing on Mary Magdalene's day. She had, he said, brought hailstones the previous year because she had not been honored. Several important men got up to speak on the subject, and it was resolved that from now on no one would plow on her day.

Minor saints may also be dropped from the calendar, as memory of events which made them important gradually recedes (Bauer, 1973). Hence, the particular configuration of saints days observed in a parish may change over time.

In Enda Mariyam, the most important saint is Kudisti Mariyam (Saint Mary), the patron saint of the parish for whom the *tabot* inside the church is consecrated, and for whom the village is named. The day of Kudisti Mariyam falls on the 21st of each month, and on the 21st of Hedar (November) each year. To ensure the continued protection and benevolence of Kudisti Mariyam, every adult in the village observes the prescribed work prohibitions on these days. Maintaining the goodwill of the patron saint of the village is extremely important. Without it, the village may become vulnerable to various kinds of misfortune, almost always manifest in the form of a localised natural calamity. As Bauer (1973: 93) notes:

Disasters such as epidemics and droughts are attributed to the displeasure of the patron saint. In a region like Inderta where rain comes in the form of small storms affecting very small areas, sometimes less than a whole parish in extent, the role of the church in what might be called ethno-meteorology becomes more than plausible (Bauer, 1973: 93).

In addition to saints honoured by the parish as a whole, every head of a well-established household has their own patron saint. On the day of this saint, the head of the household calls their *abat nefsi*, or priest confessor, to come bless the beer and food that has been prepared in the saint's honour, and guests are invited to eat and drink. This ritual, called a *mezeker*, is repeated each month, as well as once a year. Heads of newly-established households, however, are not expected to hold a *mezeker*, partly because it is not yet clear the household will endure, and partly because it is understood that a new household cannot manage the economic cost this entails. If a household has successfully endured for several years, however, the household head will be criticised if they fail to begin honouring a patron saint.

Individual adults may also choose to honour other saints that have personal significance for them through membership in a *mahaber*, or voluntary feasting association. A *mahaber* is normatively comprised of 12 people who meet monthly to eat and drink together in honour of a particular saint. Members take it in turn to host the feast once a year. According to informants, the costs associated with their hosting

obligations have meant that many people have been forced to drop out of their *mahaber* in recent years, and especially since the mid-1980s. Possibly for this reason, *mahaber* did not figure as prominently in Enda Mariyam as expected, especially given their attention in the literature on Amhara society. Reminick (1975: 29) notes, for example, that "The religious activities of the peasantry are largely carried out through the institution of the maheber."

The large number of holidays dedicated to personal and parish saints, together with other holy days in the Ethiopian Orthodox calendar, serve to regulate the activities of daily social life. They form a prescriptive schedule for what types of work can and cannot be done, as well as what foods can and cannot be eaten. To remain "under God's control" is thus to manage the demands of subsistence production in such a way that tasks such as ploughing and grinding are carried out in the short intervals between holidays. To conduct such work on a holiday is tantamount, in the words of one informant, to putting "one's meat (wealth) before one's soul." Putting one's wealth before one's soul constitutes a wandering from God's rules and from the protection of his saintly intermediaries.

3. Bending the Rules: Religious Practice and Agricultural Production

Not everyone, however, is in an equal position to place their soul before their wealth. Among farmers, there is a differential capacity to observe work prohibitions during holidays associated with the uneven distribution of capital between households, and with the constraints on farming that holidays create more generally.

Religious holidays greatly reduce the number of working days that can be spent on the land. More importantly, they contract the already narrow margins of time within which certain agricultural activities must be completed, such as ploughing and planting, in order to maximise the benefits of rainfall. This tends to confer a significant advantage on those farmers who have ready at their disposal all of the inputs required for agricultural production, including adequate labour and a team of oxen. Farmers who lack these inputs find themselves caught in a structural tension between the time demands of agricultural production and the time demands of religious observance.

Consequently, some farmers bend the rules by carrying out prohibited activities such as ploughing on holidays. One way to do this is to travel to another village that is not observing a holiday. Because each parish observes a slightly different configuration of saints' days, farmers can exploit this difference to fulfill loan agreements for agricultural capital. During saints' days in Enda Mariyam, for example, some farmers travelled to the neighbouring parishes of Enda Michael and Mai Woini to work in repayment of oxen loans. The juggling of saints' days in this way mitigates to some extent the problem of farmers who lack oxen, by enabling them to honour loan agreements without using up precious work days in their own village.

However, as seen in Chapter 3, the majority of oxen loans are arranged between farmers living in the same village. When oxen become available for loan, farmers must utilize them immediately or risk falling behind in the schedule of crop production. As a result, some people are forced to plough within their own village during holidays.

Ploughing during a holiday carries the strongest prohibition, because it is directly associated with the attempt to increase one's wealth. It is also one of most visible types of work a farmer conducts. While it may be possible to discreetly gather cut stalks during a holiday, it is extremely difficult to hide the fact that one is ploughing, especially when oxen have been obtained from another household. Ploughing on a holiday within one's own village thus normatively requires a public demonstration that one is still remaining obedient to God's rules. One way to do this is to work late in the afternoon, and claim that this in fact counts as the following day:

If you plough on a holiday, it is a problem, because you put your meat (wealth) before your soul. But if you don't plough, this is also a problem. So people may cheat. For example, they may work on Senbet (Sunday) afternoon. They will say this is not really Senbet, it is already starting to be Senuy (Monday). If you work on a holiday, you can work in the afternoon, and say this is the next day (Yohanis Elifeh, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

"Cheating" in this manner helps farmers manage the problem that religious holidays create for agricultural production. It is not without risk, however. While cheating is ostensibly a bending rather than a breaking of the rules, it is still a violation of God's regulations, and thus carries the potential for divine punishment. Moreover, because divine punishment is usually manifest in the form of natural calamity, a farmer who

works on a holiday not only renders himself vulnerable to misfortune but he also endangers the fortunes of the community as a whole:

It is not easy to cheat. God may see this and be angry. Sometimes, if you work on a holiday, you may get a problem for yourself. Or, the whole *kushet* may be punished (Yohanis Elifeh, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

Hence, there is a parish-wide interest in monitoring the extent to which farmers work on holidays. Given the conflicting demands of religious observance and agricultural production, it is generally accepted that some cheating is inevitable. As long as this is kept to a minimum and conducted discreetly, however, it does not follow that everyone will suffer as a result. In this regard, what is at issue is not so much the impiety of the individual act of cheating, as the point at which a cumulation of acts will provoke divine punishment. As long as God's anger has not been aroused, it can be assumed the village is still under God's control.

4. The World of Practice During the *Ancien Regime*

Prior to the downfall of the Emperor, responsibility for regulating the extent to which the parish remained under God's control lay primarily with the ordained clergy of the local church. Enda Mariyam has a relatively high number of ordained clergy, including monks (*felasi*) and priests (*keshi*), and also has numerous deacons (*haleka*). This is almost certainly a function of the presence of the monastery. During the imperial period, the monastery enjoyed local fame for its historic patronage by Emperor Yohanis IV and for the piety of its monks. According to informants, Emperor Haile Selassie himself once visited. At present, the monastery mainly attracts young male initiates who receive religious instruction within its walls.¹⁰² Although the grandeur of the monastery has declined considerably, Enda Mariyam residents are nevertheless proud of its location within the boundaries of the village and believe that it enhances the benevolence of heavenly authorities toward the parish.

¹⁰² Often, these are young men with physical disabilities. They perform domestic tasks on behalf of older monks and can regularly be seen begging for grain or food throughout the *tabiya*. Iliffe (1987) has noted the importance of ecclesiastical institutions such as monasteries as providers of social support for the disabled, infirm and elderly among the Ethiopian poor.

Monks are thought to have a more direct contact with heavenly authorities than priests by virtue of their asceticism. They do not marry and do no physical labour on the land; instead, they arrange for farmers to plough their plots and carry out other kinds of farming work on their behalf. Monks are called *menani*, or "those outside the world." Because they are *menani*, their prayers are thought to have more influence with the saints. They can, for example, pronounce a *mergum* (curse) on an individual by asking a saint to send them misfortune. For this reason people are, in the words of one village informant, "A little afraid of them." Priests (*keshi*) and deacons (*haleka*), on the other hand, have virtually the same lifestyle as their parishioners. They marry, although they may not divorce, and they are also farmers who juggle the demands of subsistence production in the same manner as lay peasants.

According to older informants, during the late imperial period Enda Mariyam had the reputation of being a "big" village. This "bigness" derived from the residence there of many learned clergy. Aside from "ordinary" monks, the monastery houses several highly educated monks who work as religious teachers in the monastery school. The head of this school is also a *deftera*, or cleric highly respected for knowledge of books and lore, and for an alleged power to create amulets that cure disease. The *memher*, or head of the monastery, continues to enjoy status as the administrator of what was once a very large landholding institution.

In addition, the village was considered "big" because villagers were seen, at least publicly, to strictly observe work prohibitions during holidays and food prohibitions during fasting periods. This obedience was itself partly a function of the number and status of senior clergy attached to the monastery and the Mariyam church. With regard to holidays in particular, senior priests and monks kept careful track of the cycle of these days in both the annual and monthly calendar, and warned of their impending arrival in announcements at Sunday mass. In some cases, they also travelled through the village beating a drum, calling out the name of the holiday and enjoining people to refrain from work on that day.

Such enjoinders were not only a matter of encouraging voluntary adherence to God's rules. Priests and monks also had power to enforce the rules of religious observance. This included authority to pronounce a *gizat* - or injunction - against certain kinds of

irreligious or immoral behaviour, including work on a designated day. *Gizat* were not only a matter of religious prohibition - they were backed by secular authority as well. An individual who violated a *gizat* not only faced excommunication from the church; they also faced the possibility of monetary fines levied by the *chika shum* (headman) of the parish:

Gizat was for working, for fighting, and for dancing during fast times. If the priest said "stop doing these things", you had to stop immediately. If you didn't, it was bad for your soul. Your *abat nefsi* couldn't help you; even the patriarch couldn't help you. Only the one who made the *gizat* could forgive you. If the priest who made the *gizat* died, you would be out of the church forever. And the people themselves would criticise you. They would say, "Don't talk to him, don't give him fire." The *chika shum* also penalised this kind of person. The priest who made the *gizat* would go to the *chika shum* and say, "This man was working on a holiday." The *chika shum* would penalise that man by money. So, a person who refused to stop was punished by two things. By his soul, because he was out from the church, and by the world, because the government punished him (Haleka Wolde Michael Kasai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

According to informants, the *chika shum* typically followed the directive of church leaders in levying fines against transgressors. In this respect, a *gizat* had the practical force of law. Further, the threat of excommunication from the church was itself a potent incentive for parishioners to obey the priests. To be "out from the church" was to be excluded from the social world constituted by the parish as community. As Bauer (1973) notes, virtually all universal, non-contractual obligations in Tigray peasant society are associated with two units, the household and the parish. To lose one's parish membership was thus equivalent to losing one's social self. The implications of this were profound, especially in terms of the loss of social networks that provided access to critical resources.

As well as *gizat*, senior clerics had other means of sanction available to them: namely, control over land. Individual churches and (especially) monasteries sometimes held rights of administration over large estates of land under *gwilti* grants from the Imperial Throne. Bruce (1976) notes that ecclesiastical *gwilti* in Tigray reached vast extent by the time of Emperor Haile Selassie. Even when secular *gwilti* was abolished in 1967, *gwilti*-holding churches and monasteries retained the right of tax collection on their estates (Tareke, 1991). The church's administration of large areas of land rendered it a formidable authority within peasant society.

As noted in earlier chapters, the Enda Mariyam monastery administered approximately half the arable land in the village, under a grant from Emperor Yohanis IV. *Gwilti* grants typically conferred only the right to income from land included in the grant; however, every grant was unique (Bruce, 1976). In Enda Mariyam, it appears to have alienated large sections of *risti* estates in both Enda Mariyam and Mai Woini *kushets* and placed their use under the exclusive control of the monastery. The only way for farmers to access this land for cultivation was through rental agreements. The fact that monks also acted in the role of landlord enabled them to threaten villagers with the withdrawal of land:

Even before the TPLF came, we cheated on holidays. But at that time, people were afraid of the monks, so they hid and ploughed in rocky areas. If a monk sees you, maybe he won't give you land (Yohanis Elifeh, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

Despite the practical power of the church to enforce obedience to religious law, some cheating nevertheless took place as this comment indicates. However, informants insist that when they did cheat at farm work in the past they did it "in secret", on plots located away from the centre of the village, and late in the afternoon. These "secretive" strategies suggest that people were unwilling to provoke punishments from their church leaders, and especially the more senior monks, in light of the practical implications such punishments entailed. They further suggest that people were unwilling to compromise the reputation of the village, and the prestige of its religious institutions, by being seen to work too openly on holidays.

Religious practice during the late imperial period was not only a matter of the practical power of the church, however. It was also a matter of the way the enjoinders of the clergy to obey God's law resonated with central aspects of peasant cosmology, and especially beliefs concerning the capriciousness of individual fortune in the world. Referring to the Amhara, Levine (1965: 86) describes how fate (*edul* in Tigrinya) was used as an explanation of the contrariness of the world, and how this contributed to what he terms the "inertia" of peasant society:

The roots of this inertia go deeper. They touch a number of fundamental features in Amhara peasant culture which orient the peasantry against the introduction of novelty. One of these is the concept of fate (*eddil*) which the

Amhara invoke to account for the ups and downs of their lives. *Eddil* appears to signify the working of God's will insofar as it affects human purposes, and is to be regarded as more important than human effort in attaining one's goals. "If a man works hard he may remain poor. If he does not work hard, he may become wealthy. The outcome is due to fate." The peasant is discouraged from determined efforts to make changes to his environment because of the feeling that no matter what he does, God's disposition is what really counts.

In a similar vein, people in Enda Mariyam often use the concept of luck (*rihus*) to describe the arbitrariness with which material fortune appears determined:

You can get everything by God. But in addition, you have to work hard. Because God says, "If you work hard I will reward you. If you don't, I won't give you wealth." But there are some people who work very hard and are still poor. We say they are unlucky. God didn't help them. And there are bad or lazy people but they are rich. We say, "How can God bless them? Maybe their punishment will be after their death." We are always worried about God's decisions. There are people who are innocent; they work hard but they are still poor. It is simply by luck (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

In other words, one's success or failure in the world is ultimately a function of the expression of God's will. Although hard work is important, it is not the decisive factor determining one's worldly condition; rather, it is God's disposition that really counts.

The notion that God's disposition is what really counts pervaded the peasant world of the *ancien regime*. The legitimacy of the imperial polity itself rested on belief in the divine right of rule of the Solomonic dynasty. Although peasants mounted various forms of resistance to the abuses of power that characterised that polity (see Tareke, 1991), they rarely questioned the divine right of the rulers to rule. More locally, belief in the ultimate determinacy of God's will enabled people to account for the unpredictability of the environment in which they lived, an environment in which calamities such as drought and famine were not uncommon, and where political insecurity and warfare were often rife (see Caulk, 1978).

The teachings of the church echoed these beliefs at a more formal level. At Sunday mass and on other occasions both public and private, people were reminded that hard work alone does not guarantee material success - one must first of all remain obedient to God. Further, local or regional calamities were identified by the church as

divine punishments for the selfishness or wickedness of the people.¹⁰³ In the absence of a counter-discourse on the causes of disaster, people had little basis to question the legitimacy of these teachings.

In effect, the local practice of Ethiopian Orthodoxy during the late imperial period operated in the context of a unified worldview. There was nothing in the social landscape of the Tigray peasant to contradict fundamental assumptions about human society and its relationship to God. These assumptions were rather produced and reproduced by the ecological conditions in which people lived, and by the doctrines of an ecclesiastical hierarchy whose authority was not in question.

As an aside, however, it is worth noting that while the authority of the church hierarchy was not in question, people had few illusions about individuals within that hierarchy. Informants often mentioned the greediness of monks during the imperial period. They describe the "bribes" required (honey, sheep, butter) to obtain land from the monastery, and note that the monastery typically gave the best land to those who gave the best bribes. The monastery also administered the use of gifts (grain, food, beer, cash) to the Mariyam church. Informants say these were often more used for the benefit of individual monks than for the benefit of the ritual life of the parish. As one farmer noted, "We always mistrusted the monks; they always cheated us." Priests came in for less criticism, being themselves peasant farmers. However, as Levine (1965: 169) notes:

Although there are devout and kindly men among them, the Ethiopian Priests have never been particularly noted for their moral qualities. Often they are ungenerous and scheming, and ready to exploit their position at the expense of the laity.

Hence, although farmers in Enda Mariyam sometimes violated the rules of religious observance by ploughing on a holiday, these violations did not constitute a challenge to the supremacy of the rules themselves, or to the authority of those responsible for enforcing them. During the revolution, however, a series of reform measures were

¹⁰³ Such explanations of disaster were not limited to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church but were common throughout the social world of the *ancien regime*. Writing about pre-20th century famine, for example, Pankurst (1985: 46) notes "the long-established Ethiopian tradition of blaming natural calamities on the wickedness of the people."

introduced that served to fracture the unity of this world view, and to invest violations of religious law with new meaning that rendered them more problematic than simply bending the rules.

5. Overview of Reform Measures

The historic role of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in legitimising the Imperial Throne led the TPLF to view the Ethiopic Church as part of the "feudal" system it was seeking to transform. Importantly, it was the church as a terrestrial institution and its power over the peasantry that were considered problematic, rather than religious belief *per se*. From the TPLF's point of view, the power of the church to regulate peasant practice and its promotion of "backward" beliefs were obstacles to rural development. As one cadre noted:

The church doesn't want people to grow more crops and to develop. They want to keep the people poor, so the people will believe it is only by God they can develop. If people believe more in God, they will obey the priests, and give them more gifts (Berhane Meinjus, political cadre, Dega Tembien *wereda*).

Consequently, during the armed struggle the TPLF introduced a series of measures that served to restrict the authority of the church more closely to "the things of the soul." This included outlawing the clerical prerogative of *gizat* in all cases where it affected the deployment of peasant labour on the land.¹⁰⁴ In practical terms, this meant abrogating the power to pronounce injunctions against work on holidays. In tandem with outlawing *gizat*, restrictions were also introduced on the act of excommunication. In particular, the church was prohibited from attempting to extend the consequences of excommunication into the wider social realm:

In the past, the church could control more the things in the world. It could excommunicate a person, and tell the people not to talk to them. Now, it is forbidden to do this. Now, for the things of the world the *bayto* is strong, and

¹⁰⁴ Although the TPLF did not specifically outlaw *gizat* against other types of behaviour, informants in Enda Mariyam say that clergy members are now reluctant to make any such pronouncements. As one man noted, "The TPLF didn't say don't make *gizat* for fighting, for murder. But the priests are afraid, and they follow it simply."

for the things of the soul and of religion the church is strong. Now, the church keeps more to the things of the soul (Abba Gere Amlak, monk, Enda Mariyam).

In addition to curbing the power of the church, political administrators set out to modify certain aspects of local religious practice. The large number of holidays in the Ethiopian Orthodox calendar was a specific target for intervention. According to one TPLF cadre, "To increase the number of days that people work on the land is our main struggle."

Initially, this was done by hosting district conferences with clerics from each local church. During these conferences, clergy members were persuaded to adopt a specified schedule of holidays to be observed in both annual and monthly calendars. According to informants in Enda Mariyam, whose conference occurred in 1982, this included nationally recognised holy days such as Beahl Ezgiher (Christmas), Timket (Epiphany), Fashiga (Easter) and Fulseta (Assumption), and the day of the patron saint of the parish. Other holidays, however, including minor saints' days and the weeks of Beahl Hamsa and Tahmer Mariyam, were designated as working days for the first time. Once agreement was reached at conference level, the reform was introduced to parish residents:

There was a meeting of all the churches and they discussed about minimising the holidays, because it creates problems for people not to work. There were priests at the meeting who opposed this idea strongly, but the TPLF influenced them. When the priests argued in the conference, the TPLF said, "Do you believe a person can get more by working more?" and the priests said, "Yes". Then the TPLF said, "When do they work then?" By this they convinced the priests. After, we had a meeting here and we argued strongly, but TPLF said, "The priests have more knowledge in these things than you and they are convinced, so why do you argue like this?" So lastly, as you see, they convinced us (Haleka Wolde Michael Kasai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

In addition to setting a ceiling on the number of holidays, political cadres also set out to convince peasants that the high number of such days was part of a "feudal" culture responsible for perpetuating their poverty. Without questioning the legitimacy of Ethiopian Orthodoxy, the TPLF nevertheless taught a political analysis of poverty that ran counter to the teachings of the church. At a broad level, poverty was linked to the historic oppression of the Tigray people under imperial rule, and the military

dictatorship of the Derg. More locally, it was linked to land degradation and poor agricultural and land husbandry practices.

As well as garnering support for the armed struggle, this analysis was aimed at motivating peasants to participate in rehabilitation and development activities, by emphasising the primacy of human action rather than of God in determining material well-being. Implicitly, it also served to isolate as "anti-development" those individuals who did not support the reform measures.

That a majority of local clergy acquiesced, at least publicly, in the introduction of these measures can be partly linked to the war, which had physically divided Tigray into "liberated" areas under the TPLF's control, and areas - primarily towns - under the military control of the Derg. This was mirrored by a division in the administrative hierarchy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In liberated areas, individual churches and monasteries were cut off from communication with the central church of Tigray in the provincial capital, Makele, and from communication through Makele to the patriarch in Addis Ababa. As a result of their relative isolation, many clerics found it expedient to shift allegiance to the new administration, or at least refrain from publicly opposing its programmes.

In 1989, however, when the TPLF "liberated" the whole of Tigray and travel to the major towns became possible once again, priests and monks based in rural areas were able to re-establish contact with higher levels of church administration. According to informants, the re-establishment of these links generated a new confidence among local church leaders, and in some cases a new flow of resources to rural parishes. In the context of these developments, and possibly in order not to antagonise provincial-level church officials whom they now governed, the TPLF relaxed its restrictions on religious holidays at around this time. In local meetings, cadres announced that there would no longer be a ceiling on the number of such days; instead, it was up to each individual to decide such matters for themselves. At the same time, cadres continued advocating the benefits of observing only a minimum number of holidays each year.

6. Implications of Reform

Reforms introduced by the TPLF shifted the institutional setting in which religious practice operated. Specific measures intended to restrict the power of the church, such as the outlawing of *gizat*, were underwritten by the more general decline in the church's terrestrial authority after land reform. As noted earlier, all monasteries and churches that formerly enjoyed rights of taxation, tribute and management of land through *gwillti* grants were divested of these rights, and land was re-allocated to individual clergy in the same manner as lay peasants. In places such as Enda Mariyam, where the monastery lost control over extensive holdings, land reform greatly diminished the practical power of the church to regulate peasant practices.

During the early years of the revolution, this loss of church power was counterbalanced by the rigorous exercise of administrative control from the TPLF. The TPLF's initially stringent policy on holidays, implemented by political cadres working in close proximity to village life, established a new set of rules for religious practice. These rules indicated that more days should be spent working the land, and that peasants who did so would not face punitive action from either ecclesiastical or secular officials. In this regard, the TPLF provided the authoritative stamp of approval for putting one's wealth before one's soul.

Some peasants were quick to take advantage of this. Poor peasants in particular, who lacked adequate farm capital, began ploughing and doing other types of agricultural work on holidays that were strictly observed prior to the revolution. These included annual holidays such as Beahl Hamsa and Tahmer Mariyam, as well as most monthly saints' days (with the exception of the patron saint of the village, and the patron saint of the individual farmer). According to informants, once a few people began openly working on these days, other farmers followed suit:

It is after the TPLF came that people started to work on holidays. For example, Tahmer Mariyam. This was a weeklong holiday in the past. Now we weed at this time. In the beginning, there were a few people who started working on holidays. Then the other people said, "Why don't I work? Because if there is a punishment, it will be for all of us." So by this it becomes a working day (Haleka Wolde Michael Kasai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

As this comment suggests, belief that work on holidays had the potential to provoke divine retribution was not wholly undermined in the course of the revolution. Indeed, many informants say they were privately concerned about the cosmological implications of the fact that a majority of people had started working on such days. This concern was outweighed, however, by the combination of economic opportunities the new administrative setting provided, and the fact that political authorities sanctioned these opportunities through formal regulation. Moreover, as long as divine retribution did not actually manifest itself, it was possible to hold one's beliefs in suspension, especially in light of the pragmatic silence that church officials had adopted on the issue.

In this regard, the famine crisis of the mid-1980s was a highly meaningful event. Although counter-insurgency warfare played a part, the most important systemic factor behind the crisis was a prolonged drought cycle beginning in the early 1980s.¹⁰⁵ The arrival of this natural catastrophe, at a time when many people were openly working on holidays, created a climate ripe for an interpretation of famine as divine punishment:

This problem of drought came due to the people becoming weak in religion. We became out of the control of God. Then God sent us this disaster (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

Although Enda Mariyam was less severely affected than other areas - for example, few households were forced into distress migrations in search of food - the effects of the crisis were nevertheless profound. Indeed, that the village escaped the worst effects of famine tended to strengthen the association with divine punishment, because it was interpreted as evidence that the piety of previous generations had mitigated the severity of God's punishment. As one informant noted, "This village was

¹⁰⁵ The etiology of the Tigray famine remains a topic of debate. Many analyses fail to adequately consider the impact of warfare, including the way it restricted access to humanitarian relief for peasants living in TPLF-controlled areas (see for example Jansson, Harris and Penrose, 1987). An alternative analysis places counter-insurgency warfare at the centre of famine in Tigray and describes the impact of government campaigns specifically aimed at the destruction of the subsistence economy in rebel areas (see for example Africa Watch, 1991). The view taken here is that drought was a more decisive factor in declining levels of grain production in the early to mid-1980s. Once grain production had collapsed, however, and peasants engaged in distress migrations and other kinds of survival strategies, the war became more decisive, especially in terms of the number of starvation-associated deaths.

not as bad as others. This is because Enda Mariyam was a big village, not by this generation's people, but in the past. No one migrated from this village. The big people in the past helped us."

Not long after the crisis abated, the TPLF lifted its formal restrictions on the number of holidays. At around the same time, members of the Mariyam church re-established contact with ecclesiastical officials in Makele and began speaking more openly about the importance of obedience to God's rules. In light of these developments, and in lieu of divine punishment that the famine was seen to represent, some people who had begun working on holidays such as Beahl Hamsa, ceased to do so once again. Since the late 1980s, informants say that there has been a gradual increase in the number of holidays observed in the parish as compared with the early years of the revolution.

However, this does not constitute a return to the "old" system of religion. There are critical differences between religious practice in the present day as compared with the pre-revolutionary period. Importantly, this practice is no longer regulated by a single authoritative framework, whether of the church or of the TPLF. Although, as will be seen later, church officials have begun to speak more openly on the question of obedience to God, restrictions on their practical power to enforce that obedience remain in place:

In the past, a priest can prohibit people from working on holidays. If a man is working, the *abat nefsi* will be told, and he may be dismissed from the church. But now, the priest can't prohibit. If you want to work on a holiday, you can. Even my *abat nefsi* can tell me nothing, because he is afraid. Now, if he told you to stop working, he can be punished (Haleka Wolde Michael Kasai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

Meanwhile, political administrators no longer enforce an alternative set of rules concerning holidays as they did prior to 1989. Rather, they rely on the cogency of their arguments concerning the material benefits of more working days to influence peasant practice. In effect, political authorities have formally "deregulated" religious holidays, by shifting the burden of responsibility onto the individual.

In the absence of authoritative control, there has been a loss of conformity in religious practice within the village. While some farmers have stopping ploughing on important

holidays such as Beahl Hamsa, others continue to do so. More significantly, some of those who continue to plough explain their action not in terms bending the rules, but in terms of the autonomy of the individual to decide for themselves how to apply those rules:

After the TPLF taught the people, everyone has knowledge, and they can follow their own way. The TPLF didn't force people to work, but still they say it is better not to have too many holidays. They say it is your own choice. For example, I started working on Beahl Hamsa before (1989) and still I am working on Beahl Hamsa, because I have a problem. It is a personal decision (Alem Techliwoini, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

In other words, the potency of the "old" system of religion has been undermined, and the unified worldview that once informed religious practice has been fractured. What remains is a "deregulated" system in which individuals make autonomous and self-referential decisions concerning which holidays they will observe. It is this individual autonomy in decision-making that is at the heart of present-day debates in the village. Before discussing these debates, however, it is worthwhile considering how changes in the local political economy have contributed to the emergence of "religion" as a contested area of social life.

7. The Political Economy of Religious Practice

In his pre-revolutionary study of Hareyna village, Bauer (1973: 130) makes a telling observation about the relationship between peasant labour and the celebration of saints' days:

While labor is abundant, there is no "unemployment". Certain institutions, such as the celebration of saints' days by the prohibition of plowing, insure a demand for labor by preventing a man from expanding the output of his household indefinitely through the use of his own labor alone... These saints' days, in effect, publicly ration the way a man may allocate his labor. The recognition of new saints' days increases the demand for labor. This is to the advantage of those persons without capital equipment to farm, who find themselves on the labor market... My impression is that the number of saints' days is just large enough so that all are employed, and just few enough so that all land within the parish manages to get plowed each season (Bauer, 1973: 130).

Bauer emphasises the positive function of religious holidays in Hareyna by noting how they served to absorb surplus labour and prevent "unemployment". A slightly different interpretation suggests that holidays helped reinforce a vertically oriented pattern of social relationships prior to land reform.

The reason for this has to do with the highly uneven distribution of land resources at that time, and the way holidays serve to condense agricultural activities into short work intervals. In a context where a minority of "big men" controlled a majority of both land and oxen resources, the demand for labour amongst these men was very high indeed. In order to cover all their landholdings in the short intervals between holidays, big men relied heavily on the provision of agricultural labour from their poorer dependents. For many poor farmers whose own landholdings were insufficient to produce enough grain to meet subsistence requirements, it made sense to direct their labour to the land of rich patrons, and rely on these patrons for loans or gifts of grain. In this regard, the high number of holidays during the imperial period helped tie farm labour to relations of patronage and clientship, by deepening the dependence of big men on the labour of the poor and the dependence of the poor on the patronage of big men.

Since land reform, however, the pattern of social relationships in the village has changed, which in turn has affected the position of religious holidays within the local economy. As noted in Chapter 4, land reform precipitated a shift from primarily vertical relationships of dependence to more diffuse and horizontally oriented networks built around transactions for agricultural inputs. These transactions are motivated, in turn, by the fact that every peasant household now holds, at least in theory, a viable amount of land for subsistence production. Peasant labour in the present day is primarily directed toward managing the demands of one's own production, and there is far less "surplus" labour available for deployment on other people's land.

In addition, the levelling down in wealth triggered by land reform means there are few farmers in the present day who can afford to hire labour:

In the past, most people were working for others. But now, people are working for themselves. Even in the past people said it was good to work for themselves, but they couldn't practise it because the land was only for the few. In the past, if one was poor he could be hired, but now people don't like to be hired. They know the rich can't give a big loan, so they don't like to be dependent on them. Now, even if they have a problem, people like to work for themselves (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

Further, off-farm employment opportunities in the district and in towns close to the district have increased since the end of the war. The availability of off-farm employment means that farmers regularly travel to Makele and other towns, and to development sites, to earn additional income in the periods between agricultural work. In addition, beginning in the late 1980s, an ambitious programme of community-based environmental rehabilitation was mounted that requires people to dedicate a certain number of days each week from January to March.

Taken together, these changes in the local economy mean it is now more difficult, in practical terms, for people to remain "under God's control." With employment more readily available, the opportunity costs of observing holidays have increased dramatically, especially in the dry season. Even when farmers do not seek off-farm employment, community-based development programmes absorb much of the "surplus" labour time available during this period. In this respect, the requirements of religious observance must now compete with other kinds of opportunities for the use of peasant labour, which provide concrete material benefit.

At the same time, belief in the consequences of wandering away from "God's control" have not disappeared. Rather, every natural calamity in Enda Mariyam has the interpretive potential for confirmation of this belief. During the revolution, when church officials adopted a policy of pragmatic silence, the contradiction between the rules of religious observance and the requirements of subsistence production were less acutely felt. Since the end of the war, however, church officials have become more outspoken and have in some cases sought to exploit this contradiction as a means of reasserting control.

8. Labour Versus God: A Competition of Discourses

In the avowedly "democratic" setting of post-war governance, political officials have limited scope to intervene in the internal affairs of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. They do not, for example, regulate the appointment of ecclesiastical officials at regional or district level, nor do they interfere in the day-to-day workings of church administration at parish level. Further, although political cadres continue to intermittently assess the overall influence of the church, especially in terms of the implementation of the government's development agenda, they no longer monitor as carefully the specific content of church teachings.

In this setting, local church officials have begun to take advantage of opportunities created by a more relaxed political environment to reclaim some of their former influence. With restrictions remaining on the scope of their authority over the "things of the world", this is being done by exploiting the church's remaining sphere of authority; namely, the "things of the soul." In particular, church officials have begun to fuel public debates, effectively submerged during the war, over the question of work on religious holidays:

During the war, people and the priests were afraid of TPLF, because if they were unwilling to work, it would be a political question. So everyone was accepting it simply. But this had its own reason. For example, if one priest said don't work on Sunday, and the enemy came on Sunday night and burnt or damaged the land, the priest would face many problems. It would be thought he had some connection to the enemy. So, at that time, in order not to face these problems, people accepted it simply, even if they didn't believe it in their hearts. But now, it is peaceful, and people and the priests have started talking publicly, because there is nothing to make them afraid. Now, it has become a big discussion (Ato Kasai, *mikre bet* chairman, Tegula).

Underpinning the question of work on religious holidays is a more fundamental issue of concern for the church. That is, the extent to which the revolution has undermined the dominance of a prior discourse concerning the primacy of God's will in determining a person's fortunes on earth. This discourse is not only a matter of theology; it is also a matter of ideology. This is because it serves to orient peasants toward obedience to God, and to God's terrestrial intermediaries as the most effective means of achieving success in the world. During the *ancien regime*, this discourse

helped legitimise a social order in which church officials enjoyed political and economic privileges. For some clerics, re-establishing the dominance of this discourse is pivotal to regaining some of these privileges.

However, the church is not a monolithic institution. Within individual parishes, clergy members have different attitudes toward the erosion of church authority that the revolution precipitated. Broadly speaking, there is more support for the present-day political administration among the "lower" echelons of the clergy, including the less eminent and less wealthy of the parish priests. The interests of these clergy are not substantially differentiated from the interests of the community as a whole (see Hoben, 1970). In the case of poor priests in particular, the revolution often brought concrete material benefit in the form of measures such as land redistribution.

For senior clergy, however, and especially those priests and monks who administered *gwilti*-holding institutions, the present government represents a continuation in slightly different form of a political system that caused the loss of their elite position within peasant society. In Enda Mariyam, it is monks in general, and the administrators of the monastery in particular, who feel the loss of this position most acutely.

Prior to land reform, monks in Enda Mariyam enjoyed considerable material wealth. Not only did they receive income in the form of rent from the monastery's landholdings, but they also received additional gifts of honey, butter, small livestock, food, and beer from farmers hoping to obtain better quality plots to rent, as well as loans of grain. By virtue of their material wealth and their administration of land, monks also enjoyed virtually the same stature as titled nobles; they received similar public displays of deference and had a similar ability to command the service of others.

During the revolution, the monastery's holdings were broken up, and individual monks were distributed plots in the same manner as lay peasants. Divested of its land, the main form of institutional income for the monastery is presently gifts from local parishioners, typically in the form of grain, food, and beer. Since the levelling down in wealth that land reform entailed, however, and especially since the famine crisis of the mid-1980s, the level of these gifts has declined markedly. Further, although they are

still respected as *menani*, monks no longer receive the same expressions of public deference they once did, nor do they any longer command the service of lay peasants in the same form. It is this combined loss of material and social privilege that is acutely felt:

In the past, we had much income and a good life. In the past, we made 20 pots of *sewa* (beer) for celebrations, but now we can only make five. In the past, the people gave us honey or goats. But now, we are neglected by the people. Now the people say, "We gave you before, how can we give you anything now?" Now, instead of helping us, they push us into the street. Before, the land was with us and the people were under our control. People in the past put us as a lord, but now the people are like a lord (Yinota Isra, head teacher, Enda Mariyam monastery).

As this comment suggests, the terrestrial authority of the monastery has been significantly eroded, and people are no longer under its "control" as in the past. However, the monastery retains its customary management of the Mariyam church. This includes co-ordinating the various duties of priests and deacons attached to the church, such as the performance of daily prayer and weekly mass, and organising parish-wide celebrations associated with important holy and saints' days in the religious calendar. A council of senior monks administrate this responsibility, together with the most eminent priests in the parish. It is these senior monks and priests who are at the forefront of efforts to revive the dominance of what can be called a "traditional" discourse on religious practice.

These efforts have brought senior clerics into both direct and indirect forms of contestation with local and district-level political administrators, and especially those responsible for implementing the government's rural development agenda. This agenda, based on the notion of self-reliance and centred on community-based projects, relies heavily for its success on the mobilisation of peasant labour. Because this mobilisation is now essentially voluntary,¹⁰⁶ the extent to which peasants believe they can effect improvements in the material conditions of their lives by additional labour inputs is paramount.

¹⁰⁶ The first year of fieldwork, 1993, was also the first year in which food aid was not used as payment for participation in development work.

In this sense, the government has a vested interest in ensuring the dominance of a "revolutionary" discourse concerning the primacy of human action and hard work as the most effective means of achieving success in the world. This discourse not only provides the justification at an ideological level for peasant participation in rural development initiatives, but it also serves to legitimise the authority of the government itself.

During the armed struggle, when church officials were effectively silent and when additional labour days from peasants were in any case mandatory, there was less need for political administrators to rely on the dominance of this discourse to implement their objectives. In the deregulated and "democratic" context of present-day governance, however, there is a more pressing need to resist the efforts of church officials to undermine development initiatives at an ideal level. As one political cadre explained:

During the war, all groups were strongly working for the struggle. But now, some in the church have become weak. They say, "We are in peace - what is the need to struggle?" They may tell people not to build roads or clinics or other things but build a church instead. They may easily convince some people who are strong in religion. But most people don't support this. They support development with the TPLF. Most people don't accept the building of a church instead of these things. But if we are distracted, the church may make propaganda for the people not to work. This requires a lot of struggle from us, because religion is strong in the people (Berhane Meinjus, political cadre, Dega Tembien *wereda*).

In this respect, it can be argued that church and state are engaged in a form of competition for the allegiance of peasants to the different discourses they each espouse. These discourses each provide a legitimising ideology for the practical application of institutional power, and for the exercise of authoritative control.

However, there are factors that influence the balance of this "competition" in the government's direction, related not so much to the cogency of its arguments or the exercise of its institutional power as to the way the social order has changed. Prior to the revolution, the nature of the social order gave a practical validity to the church's teachings concerning the source of good fortune on earth. In the quasi-feudal system of the imperial period, it was political rather than economic calculations that often provided peasant farmers with the best chance for success. As noted earlier, in a

context where access to agricultural inputs was intimately bound up in a nexus of patron-client relationships, undercapitalised and land-poor farmers could not in any case increase their material well-being through extra days of labour on their land. Rather, it was frequently more expedient for such farmers to judge the degree of support that could be obtained from service to big men, and to maintain that support through culturally-elaborated forms of clientship.

Since land reform, however, political and economic spheres have become increasingly distinct. Present-day relationships operate around transactions that are more apparently economic in nature, and the input of additional labour days on the land is seen to lead more directly to material benefit. This includes both labour on one's own land as well as work in the towns and on development programmes. Hence, the "traditional" discourse no longer finds the same degree of affinity with the social world in which peasants reside.

Nevertheless, this discourse still carries enormous potency. This is due in part to the unpredictability of the environment in which subsistence production occurs. Even when a farmer is working more days on the land, a freak event such as a localised hailstorm or the outbreak of plant disease that affects his crop and no one else's, can serve as evidence of the determinacy of God's will. In this regard, the "traditional" discourse is most meaningful, and hence most powerful, during moments of natural calamity. Consequently, when senior clergy enjoined people in 1994 to obey work prohibitions during Beahl Hamsa - an enjoinder that was largely ignored - and when they then pointed to the outbreak of crop disease as confirmation of the truth of their instruction, many people were "convinced":

Beahl Hamsa was in June, and during this time, many people ploughed. Even in the past, some people ploughed at this time, but since the TPLF came it has become common. Also, in the past it was secret; it was not public as it is today. But then, there was a strong rain with ice, and this *alkway* disease came. The monks told us not to work on this holiday, but the people didn't listen. But now the people are afraid. This Sunday they went to the church, and the monks said, "Do you believe us now?" Now the monks and priests are discussing a lot on this. They are saying, "You have to be strong on religion." Everyone is begging each other to do like this. Now, everyone is convinced (Gaysay Tekien, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

In this sense, the "traditional" discourse reassumes affinity with the world in which peasants reside when the unpredictability of that world, in the form of a natural calamity, is most apparent. In the face of natural calamity, the "traditional" discourse achieves temporary dominance by virtue of its meaningfulness as an explanation of the arbitrary quality of the human condition. At such times, church officials can exploit this meaningfulness to assert their status as terrestrial gatekeepers to the benevolence of heavenly authorities, with attendant implications for their own material and social advantage.

When evidence of divine punishment for wandering away from God's control is not immediately manifest, however, the potency of this discourse wanes. At such times, the demands of subsistence production, temporarily submerged, reassume their primacy. As noted earlier, since land reform, the nature of these demands makes it more problematic for people to remain under God's control. Hence, although many people in Enda Mariyam insisted they were "convinced" after the outbreak of the *alkway* disease, this did not necessarily alter the practical balance they were compelled to strike between their wealth and their souls:

The people say all these problems came from working on holidays, and because we don't love each other and we don't fast. Everybody says the same thing. But we don't practise it. The monks and the priests convinced the people, and the people believe, but the problem is in the practice. We agree, but no one practises it. The problem is, if we see somebody working, we follow him (Haleka Wolde Michael Kasai, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

9. "The Problem is in the Practice": Interpreting Disjuncture

As noted above, during the late imperial period many people "cheated" by working on holidays. However, this "cheating" was accommodated within the framework of a religious system whose legitimacy was unquestioned.

At present, the fact that more people are working on more holidays is not only a matter of "cheating". It is also a matter of decline in dominance of the "old" system of religion itself. In the midst of this decline, disjunctures between the rules of religious observance and the realities of religious practice have more profound implications.

For many people, they are evidence of an increasing selfishness among village residents:

The TPLF doesn't say you have to work on holidays. But people got the hint, and they started working on holidays. The hint was that the TPLF said if you work more you can get more. What people do now is competition. They see one man working and they say, "Why is he working on a holiday? What makes me different?" Now, people are only looking after their own interest, and we became selfish (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

This perception is underlined by the fact that many farmers who own a team of oxen, and are therefore considered to be "rich" by present-day standards, are also working on holidays such as Beahl Hamsa. During the *ancien regime*, the practices of the rich provided an important indicator of how far the parish was under God's control. In a context where there was tacit acceptance that poor farmers would often need to "cheat" on holidays, it was rich farmers who furnished the public demonstration of obedience to God's rules because it was they who could afford to refrain from work on more days.

At present, however, "rich" farmers are not only unable to afford all of the prescribed holidays as in the past; they also often cannot afford the more important holidays such as Beahl Hamsa. Hence, it is inevitable that many more people, and consequently the parish as whole, will be perceived as "selfish".

That selfishness within the village is perceived to have grown is attributed by some people to the loss of institutional control over peasant practice on the part of the church. Although that control has been formally restricted, there is nevertheless frustration that the church did not assert its authority more forcefully during the armed struggle and has failed to do so in a peacetime context:

It is correct that people are working on holidays, but it is better to ask about the leadership of the church. The problem is now the leadership has become weak. Now, everybody says, "I am clever, I know everything that the TPLF taught us." But when people work on holidays the religious leaders don't take action, and people continue to work. If they told me not to do something, or penalised me, I wouldn't repeat it a second time (Alem Wolde Meliel, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

Such perceptions of "weakness" in the church can be linked to the fact that church officials are sometimes reluctant to publicly perform certain aspects of their religious duties that were not specifically affected by revolutionary reform. This reluctance is partly due to pragmatic assessment of the attention this might attract from political cadres, and partly to the fact that withholding the performance of these duties has utility in terms of exercising control over parishioners.

One of these duties is to keep track of which days in both the month and the year are holy or saint's days. In Enda Mariyam, it is senior monks who have this responsibility, based on their knowledge of the Bible and their greater closeness to the saints. Since the majority of villagers are illiterate, and in any case lack ecclesiastical training, they depend on monks to identify these days in relation to the Ethiopian calendar, and to give advance notice of their arrival. Although not everyone will choose to observe work prohibitions, they nevertheless expect the monks to fulfill their responsibility, by tracking the prescribed schedule of holidays.

In July 1994, a confrontation between the head of the monastery and members of the parish occurred over precisely this issue, in which monks were accused of deliberately withholding information about a specific holiday:

Yesterday in the church, the people asked the head of the monastery, "We heard that tomorrow is a holiday, how is it?" The monk said, "It was a holiday in the past, but not now." He stopped talking; he didn't give the exact answer. People became angry and they said, "We didn't ask you to tell us how it is now, we ask you to tell us by referring to the book (Bible)." But the monk didn't give an exact answer. Today, the people of Enda Mariyam are working, but in other areas there is no work. People from Mezegat saw people working in Enda Mariyam and they became surprised. They said, "This Enda Mariyam was a village of big people; how do you work on this big holiday?." When I heard this, I became very sad. This is done by the monks on purpose, to make a conflict with the people (Gaysay Tekien, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

The fact that monks had, in effect, abdicated their responsibility for publicly tracking the schedule of religious holidays on this occasion was the source of animated discussion in the village for several weeks. For some people, the incident was seen as one in a series of attempts by monks to reassert their influence through the manipulation of their religious duties. Another incident occurred the previous January, during the annual celebration of Timket. During Timket, monks traditionally remove

the *tabot* from inside the Mariyam church and carry it to a nearby river, where a communal baptism takes place after a night of prayer. On this occasion, however, monks simply paraded the *tabot* once around the church courtyard and then placed a bowl of water outside the church, which they blessed before inviting the assembled parish to come forward to be baptised. According to older villagers, such a dramatic "downgrading" of the Timket celebration was unheard of in their lifetime. Reporting on a discussion about the incident held in church the following Sunday, one informant said the monks deliberately impoverished the celebration in retaliation for the lack of adequate gifts they had received for its performance.

For other people in the village, the failure of monks to fulfill their religious duties is symptomatic of the extent to which the church had become "weak" in the aftermath of revolution. That the church has become "weak" poses a dilemma, both in terms of the growth of "selfishness" within the parish and in terms of the balance individuals are compelled to strike between their wealth and their soul. During the *ancien regime*, this balance was struck within the totalising framework of the "old" system of religion, wherein the rules of religious observance were both publicly declared and practically enforced. The end of this dominance not only undermined the authoritative framework within which these rules were deployed; it also served to dilute the force of the rules themselves. It is this new ambiguity around the rules of religious observance, underlined by the "weakness" of the church and the disengagement of political administrators, that poses the dilemma. At present, people are judging the balance between their wealth and their soul in a context where the consequences of those judgements are much less clearly defined. As one man noted, "Now we are confused, because we don't know the rules."

Within this more ambiguous context, the most contentious debates in Enda Mariyam over the question of religion involve different interpretations of where responsibility for regulating religious practice should reside. Broadly speaking, generational differences can be identified in the way this issue is confronted. Younger people, including those who hold positions of local political responsibility, tend to assert that it is up to each individual to decide for themselves whether or not to work on specific holidays.

This is not only a matter of echoing the government's "line", however. For younger men in particular, the requirements of subsistence production are rendered more

exacting by the fact that they are usually managing newly-established households. Such households are extremely fragile; the majority of divorce and dissolution of households occurs within the first couple of years after their establishment. For this reason, newly established households are not expected to perform the *mezeker*, or to provide a high level of gifts to the church. In this regard, where a household is located in the developmental cycle has an important bearing on the extent of religious practice among its members. In general, religious practice becomes more pronounced as a household ages and its chances for "success" become more assured. Hence, the interests of younger heads of households are better served by a system that guarantees the autonomy of the individual to decide the schedule of holidays they will observe, because this system provides the best scope for accommodating individual circumstance.

Conversely, older men who head well-established households tend to support the position that everyone in the village should conform to the same schedule of religious holidays. This schedule should be dictated not by the exigencies of individual circumstance but by obedience to God's rules as encapsulated in the Bible and translated to the parish by senior clergy. Many senior clergy members support this same position. For both these groups of people, the loss of conformity in religious practice is not only problematic in terms of the potential for divine retribution; it is also problematic in terms of the decline of "traditional" culture. This culture, elaborated around the hierarchically ordered social world of the *ancien regime*, included public displays of servitude and deference to those in positions of greater social prominence. For many people who grew up within this world, the decline of "traditional" culture is synonymous with the decline of a moral order in which age commanded respect:

Now there is a thing called "evaluation". In a meeting, there is a discussion about working on holidays. Some say we have to work on holidays because we are becoming poor from having too many holidays. But some old people say we don't have to work. They say it is only by God that we are blessed. After this, there is a vote, and all the young people say we have to work. If the old try to convince them, they say no, it is impossible. Now the old can say nothing (Tekle Himinut Yohanis, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

What appears, then, is a generationally based contestation between different orientations toward religious practice, informed by the socioeconomic and political interests of different groups. These groups appropriate elements of either "traditional"

or "revolutionary" discourse. In this respect, by undermining the dominance of the "old" system of religion, revolutionary reform has opened up a discursive space within which contests of interest can be elaborated. The opening up of this discursive space, and the fact that people are taking advantage of the opportunities thus created, is at the core of present-day tensions within the village over the question of religion.

At the same time, there are individuals who negotiate this tension in a creative way and whose location within village debates draws on elements of both "traditional" and "revolutionary" discourses. These individuals mediate opposing orientations toward religious practice in the village by suggesting that the importance of obedience to God and the importance of hard work need not be seen as inherently contradictory. As one such individual - Alem Techliwoini - a politically influential member of the executive council of the Enda Mariyam *mikre bet*, explained:

There is no different idea between the TPLF and religion. The TPLF knows only that if you work more, you get more. They know the scientific things. But they don't know God's response. If you work on a holiday, there can be hail or drought. And I believe strongly in this. In the *memehadar* (executive council), some people don't believe in God, and some they do believe. *Memehadar* is one thing, and religion is another thing. I follow the TPLF because they gave as a right that people are all equal, and that everybody gets land. I believe that if you work hard, you get more. But also I believe that it is not only by working hard that God blesses you (Alem Techliwoini, farmer, Enda Mariyam).

These views do not represent a reflection of individual interest so much as a dynamic attempt to synthesize opposing orientations and beliefs into a coherent worldview. In this respect, individuals such as Alem Techliwoini can be considered, to paraphrase Feierman (1990: 44), as peasant intellectuals, because they draw on the discursive resources available to them to produce new ways of interpreting the contingencies of their social world.

CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSION

1. Introduction

This thesis has considered aspects of agrarian change in a Tigray village. It has been concerned with understanding the particular ways in which social relationships and social organisation have been affected by institutional reform introduced in the early 1980s by the Tigray People's Liberation Front, and formalised under a TPLF-led civilian government after the end of the war in 1991. The aim throughout has been to investigate social life in a specific village within the broader context of revolutionary reform, rather than to examine the process of revolution itself.

The investigation of institutional reform in Enda Mariyam has been carried out against the background of little prior ethnographic knowledge of rural social life in Tigray. It has also been carried out against the background of an increasing number and scale of aid programmes in the region, aimed at alleviating food insecurity and promoting growth in the agricultural sector. Many of these programmes are built upon relatively superficial assumptions about the dynamics of household wealth and local farm economies. Against this background, there have been two general concerns in my approach to the subject.

The first concern has been to provide a rich ethnographic detail of key aspects of village life. This includes, most notably, how the requirements of managing a viable household enterprise in this particular setting serve to shape wealth differentiation, the pattern of social relationships, and the dynamics of social stratification in the village. To achieve this, and to contribute to filling the knowledge gap on rural Tigray more generally, the thesis has been empirically-based. The aim has been to present information that will help lay a foundation for further analysis.

The second concern of the thesis has been to identify more precisely the ways in which institutional reform has affected social organisation in Enda Mariyam. This concern has been applied across key fields of social practice and endeavour, including agricultural production, householding, marriage and divorce, religious

practice, and status in the community. The emphasis throughout on social organisation - as opposed, for example, to an emphasis on identity and discourse - reflects the central interest of the research. That is, to understand how social institutions, relationships and practice in a specific community have been affected by revolutionary reform.

These concerns have guided the approach to the material. But what is the outcome? What conclusions can be forwarded concerning social change in Enda Mariyam, and in Tigray peasant society more generally, as a consequence of institutional reform?

2. Some Observations on the Effects of Revolutionary Reform

In general, the changes that have occurred are more complex and nuanced than is commonly understood. Rather than a profound social re-organisation and the adoption of entirely new practices, village life in the post-revolutionary period displays a degree of continuity with the pre-revolutionary period. In some respects, Enda Mariyam today is not dissimilar to Bauer's village of Haryena during the late 1960s. The peasant mode of production, centred on ox-plough, rainfed agriculture has not substantially changed. Nor has the basic division of labour along age and gender lines substantially shifted. The premises, requirements, and constraints of managing a viable household enterprise are still fundamentally the same. Indeed, to the outside observer, it would appear that people in Enda Mariyam go about the business of production and reproduction in much the same way as they have always done.

This is perhaps not surprising, considering that a transformation in the peasant mode of production was not a specific objective of the Tigray revolution. As noted in the thesis introduction, the TPLF's aim was to support an eventual transition in peasant production by first abolishing the mechanisms through which "feudal" elites maintained their position at the expense of the peasantry. Having enacted, in the wake of the Derg, a land reform programme that served this end, the TPLF did not implement any further measures aimed specifically at re-organising peasant production. Rather, peasant production was to be modernised in the context of a

national strategy of agriculture-led industrialisation¹⁰⁷, in which the peasant mode of production and peasant livelihoods would be protected, but peasants nevertheless encouraged to increase productivity in the context of rural development programmes.

The fact that the Tigray revolution left the mode of peasant production relatively unaffected accounts in large part for the historical continuity that is observable in some fundamental aspects of village social life. At the same time, it is possible to identify certain pre-existing features of Tigray social organisation that allowed for the flexible accommodation of institutional reform in key areas of social life. Most important of these are the structural significance of the individual, and the relative weakness of corporate groups.

In the introduction to this thesis, the importance of the Tigray individual was highlighted. It was noted that status and identity derive not primarily from membership in a group or category of persons, but from individual achievement, either alone or as a household head. Even the most important unit of social organisation - the household - displays a weakness of group solidarity. As Bauer (1977: 159) observes:

The Tigray individual is individuated. In passing through the household developmental process he repeatedly finds himself separated from others with whom he has been living... Nor does the Tigray individual have the solidarity with his peers one might expect in another society in which inequality was based on permanent strata, because who his peers are changes with household fortunes.

For Bauer (1975), the individualistic orientation of Tigray society fits well with the requirements of maintaining a viable household enterprise in the Tigray ecological setting. As noted in the thesis introduction, the extent to which a household can obtain access to key productive resources is largely a function of the nexus of social relationships at its disposal. Such social relationships involve ties between individuals who may be called upon to enter into exchange transactions. In a context where the productive resources available to the household are liable to

¹⁰⁷ It is beyond the scope of this discussion to outline the economic development programme of the Ethiopian government. For a discussion of this, see Hoben (1996) and Young (1997).

change, and where only a minority of households in the village possess all the necessary inputs for farming at any given time, individuals benefit from having maximum choice in terms of the social relationships they maintain. The fact that social ties among the Tigray occur almost exclusively between individuals, rather than between groups or strata, allows for such a range of choice. Individuals are not circumscribed in the social ties they establish, or the transactions they enter into, by membership in corporate groups.

In this respect, Tigray peasant villages could not be considered "corporate communities". Wolf (1966a; 1966b) uses the concept of the closed corporate peasant community to denote situations in which the most important type of social coalition peasants enter into is at the level of the community itself. In closed corporate communities, mechanisms that promote the community as corporation help strengthen the ability of peasants to withstand pressures from larger economic and political systems. Such mechanisms may include restrictions on village membership and marriage to those born within the community's confines. Moreover, it will typically be the community rather than the individual that has ultimate domain over key resources such as land. In this way, as Wolf (1966a: 86) explains:

The community... acquires the form of a corporation, an enduring organization of rights and duties held by a stable membership; and it will tend to fight off changes and innovations as potential threats to the internal order that it strives to maintain.

Although there are some similarities between Wolf's notion of the closed corporate peasant community and the pre-revolutionary Tigray village - for example, the fact that responsibility was devolved to the community for organising tribute or taxation payments to the state - there are also important differences. Whereas Wolf's (1966a: 93) ideal type of closed corporate peasant community was "especially inimical to change", the pre-revolutionary Tigray village was not. Rather, the lack of a strong corporate identity at the level of the community, and the weakness of corporate groups in Tigray social organisation more generally, rendered Tigray villages more adaptable at a structural level to institutional change. Because the Tigray community lacked a distinct corporate identity, it would not act in unison to oppose institutional change as a means of protection; rather, individuals would react

to institutional change in diverse ways depending on individual circumstance and the perceived nature of the authority of those implementing reform measures. Hence, the TPLF faced a somewhat different social landscape than did cadre of the Mexican revolution, who, as Wolf (1966a: 93) observes, faced the necessity of "breaking open" the closed corporate peasant communities of MesoAmerica:

From this point of view, the success of the Mexican Revolution... appears to lie less in its efforts at land reform than in its attempts to break open the Indian corporate communities, to curtail their autonomy, and to effect a hook-up between the political machinery of the state and political organizers in the village.

This is a noteworthy point insofar as consideration of the pre-existing social system is often left out of evaluations of agrarian reform. Here, it is suggested that certain established features of Tigray social organisation - namely, the emphasis on the individual and the absence of strong corporate groups - allowed for the adoption of institutional reform measures without requiring the shattering or weakening of key social mechanisms that, in a closed corporate community, serve to enhance community solidarity. In other words, notwithstanding the considerable skill of TPLF cadre, the work of implementing a revolutionary reform programme was perhaps rendered somewhat easier in the social context of rural Tigray than it might have been in some other social contexts.

While the peasant mode of production and the gender division of labour in rural Tigray have not significantly altered since institutional reform, there have nevertheless been other kinds of changes in social organisation and social life. As the thesis has sought to indicate, these changes were less a function of warfare and famine than of specific reform measures, and especially land reform.

As in many other cases of radical agrarian reform, the TPLF introduced a new land tenure regime based on the assumption that the pre-existing, indigenous tenure system was at the root of the prevailing agrarian crisis:

A revolutionary land reform has been carried out by the TPLF in the liberated areas since 1976... As a result the centuries old feudal relations of production have been abolished... Now that they have secure rights over their land and what they grow on it, the peasants are trying to increase production and improve their livelihood (TPLF, 1988a: 5).

Certainly, as Bruce (1988: 39) observes, Ethiopia prior to 1974 was characterised by significant inequalities in the distribution of land, especially in the south, where "exploitative landlord-tenant relationships emerged as the result of the expansion of the Ethiopian empire." According to Bruce (1988: 39), maldistribution of land led to redistributive land reform under the military government of the Derg, which established its "socialist" credentials among the southern peasantry with the 1975 Land Proclamation. In the north, however, the situation was more complex. There, exploitative landlord-tenant relationships did not emerge, because the indigenous tenure system, combined with the political power of the northern nobility, prevented large-scale alienation of peasant holdings. Although gross inequalities did exist under the indigenous tenure system, there was little actual landlessness.

However, as Middleton (1988: ix) observes, land tenure implies more than a pattern of land concentration; it also implies "a system of relations between people and groups expressed in terms of their mutual rights and obligations with regard to land." By confirming the abolition of pre-existing rights in land and implementing a new tenure regime, the TPLF set in motion a series of far-reaching and multidimensional changes in peasant society, not simply in terms of the distribution of landholdings between households but also in terms of the organisation of social relationships more generally. As Chapter 3 has illustrated, the relationship between landholding and household wealth in the Tigray farm economy is not a straightforward one. Rather, it is mediated by a dynamic interplay between land, labour, and capital assets, notably oxen. Access to these inputs is also not straightforward but achieved, for most households in the village, through various kinds of transactions and according to various terms of repayment. As Chapter 3 has shown, the distribution of productive assets between households, and the nature of the transactions through which they are obtained, serve to pattern and stratify social relationships of exchange and dependence in the village.

Broadly-speaking, it is possible to say that the egalitarian aims of the TPLF land reform have been achieved. More specifically, there has been a rough equalisation in size of landholdings between households, and there is no single household or other kind of social group capable of concentrating land in large amounts. Although, as noted in Chapter 3, oxen-rich households are in a better position to rent in additional land for cultivation, structural limitations on the availability of oxen, labour,

and seed limit the extent which capital-rich households can expand their area of cultivation indefinitely. Commensurate with the equalisation in size of landholding, there has been a levelling out in the pattern of oxen ownership in the village, characterised by a decline in the number of households owning more than one team of oxen, as well as the number of households owning no oxen at all.

In general, the trend has been toward a contraction of wealth differences between the richest and the poorest households, combined with an overall levelling down such that the richest households in Enda Mariyam today appear poor indeed in comparison with the wealth accumulated by a small number of big men (*abi seb*) in the pre-revolutionary period. In the context of this levelling down, the magnitude of dependence of the capital-poor upon the capital-rich, which is a relatively established feature of the Tigray production system and particular ecological setting, has lessened.

As discussed in Chapter 4, land reform not only precipitated an equalisation of landholdings and a levelling down in wealth situation between households in the village. It also, importantly, changed the nature of rights in land. It is no longer possible for individuals to use economic and political power to obtain large amounts of additional land for cultivation and, by this means, to accumulate large amounts of wealth in livestock and especially grain. In consequence, the village-based *abi seb*, or big man, has disappeared, and the predominant pattern of social relationships characterised by vertical ties of patronage and clientship has altered.

According to Wolf (1966a), patron-client ties are predicated on a scarcity of resources, such that patrons become powerful through their ability to mediate access to such resources. In Tigray, big men stood at the apex of patron-client ties by virtue of their control over the majority of productive resources in the village, including land and oxen. By placing formal limits on the ability of individuals to accumulate significant wealth in the village context, land reform precipitated a shift in the organisation of social relationships away from vertically oriented patron-client ties, to more diffuse networks. Resources circulate in a more horizontal direction, and no individual is able to amass enough to establish clientalist networks on a scale commensurate with the pre-reform period.

With the demise of patron-client relationships, there has been a decline in displays of deferential behaviour intended to establish and maintain rank based on the amount of *kibri* - or status-honour - an individual possessed. As Chapter 4 has shown, ranking as a village-wide undertaking based on commonly accepted criteria has largely disappeared. Individuals still show deference, although rarely in such exaggerated form as was previously the case. However, the basis upon which certain individuals receive deference has fragmented.

This was well illustrated in the course of my "going-away" banquet at the end of fieldwork. Everyone in the village was invited to attend, including priests, monks, former big men, and members of both *tabiya* and *wereda* executive committees. Several representatives from the regional government in Makele were also in attendance. During this banquet, displays of deference - in the form of relinquishing one's seat and insisting that food or drink be served to someone else first - were extremely complex. Indeed, there were many different and overlapping sets of ranking behaviour going on. Some people were primarily oriented toward honouring those persons who would have possessed the most *kibri* in the past: namely, high status monks and former big men. Others virtually ignored these people and directed their attention toward executive committee representatives and officials from Makele. Many people, however, either sought to find a compromise between the two, or simply declined to engage in ranking behaviour at all. Consequently, there was a great deal of shuffling of seats and circulation of food and drink, but with no discernible overall pattern.

In general, deferential displays have less meaning for the younger generation of village residents, and are often seen as evidence of a questionably "servile" or "feudal" attitude. For older villagers, with the decline of networks of patron-client relationships that supported the logic of social ranking, exaggerated displays of deferential behaviour have lost their strategic function and have also waned in importance. In this regard, land reform has succeeded in eliminating the social logic for elaborate displays of "feudal" behaviour, by rendering it impossible to become a big man in a manner commensurate with the past.

While the TPLF's land reform programme can be said to have achieved the intended goal of a relatively egalitarian distribution of both land and capital

resources amongst peasant households, it has also had other kinds of unintended outcomes that merit consideration. These have to do, first, with the implications of the disappearance of big men and, second, with the loss of certain aspects of the indigenous tenure system.

Despite the imbalance in distribution of resources that existed during the *ancien regime*, big men did provide a locally embedded form of social welfare support to those poor households that were able to provide labour or other kinds of service in return. Within the village, big men were expected to fulfil distributive functions by hosting feasting occasions in which poorer neighbours could eat meat, and to support the poorer members of the village through gifts or loans of grain on easy terms. In so doing, a big man contributed to his own status-honour, as well as legitimising the wealth and power he enjoyed. When informants in Enda Mariyam remember the big men of the past, many also remember such incidents of generosity and "bigness".

In his discussion of peasant communities in Southeast Asia, Scott (1976) calls attention to the informal social controls that help ensure the better-off employ their resources in ways that, in some form, also contribute to the welfare needs of the village poor. As Scott (1976: 41) observes:

Well-to-do villagers avoid malicious gossip only at the price of an exaggerated generosity. They are expected to sponsor more conspicuously lavish celebrations at weddings, to sponsor local religious activity, and to take on more dependants and employees than the average household.

Importantly, Scott (1976) observes that, whatever the actual behaviour of the individual rich man, the *principle* of redistribution of wealth is a key feature of the moral world of the peasant. In pre-revolutionary Tigray, big men who failed to share their resources with the poor, who neglected their duties to host lavish celebrations in which the poor could partake, who insisted on collecting loans of grain from those who could not repay with the collapse of their own households, and who did not provide ample gift to the church in the form of grain and thereby carry much of the burden of the cost of ritual life of the parish, were severely criticised. Such criticism significantly lowered a big man's status-honour and consequent ability to mobilise political supporters to protect and enhance his wealth.

In this regard a distinction has to be made between the regional elites whose power and privileges were largely supported by either political office or through *gwilti* rights of taxation, and the big man of the village whose position derived primarily from a concentration of either *risti* rights or access to cultivation on *risti* land. Whereas the former had little need to preserve personal influence within a particular village setting, the latter's position was strongly dependent on maintaining such influence.

Although the village big man should not, in the context of this distinction, appear as a wholly unselfish and altruistic figure, neither should he appear as a wholly rapacious and exploitative figure. Indeed, the bitter resentment of the northern peasantry prior to revolution was directed primarily against those petty government officials, local and regional nobles, and officials of church institutions who extracted an unreasonable burden of taxation and tribute, rather than the big men of the village setting who acted as patrons to networks of poorer clients.

However, big men no longer dominate the social landscape of the village. With the disappearance of big men, the redistribution of wealth in the context of social relationships is far more restricted. During the period of fieldwork, for example, no household in Enda Mariyam could afford to host a feast of commensurate scale with the celebrations of the past, and none of the individuals considered to be rich could afford to provide a significant size loan of grain. Consequently, there are few instances in which the redistribution of wealth as a moral principle is exemplified in practice, because few households can manage to support many more people than their immediate members. As noted in Chapter 4, informant comments that "we are all poor now" are, in part, a reflection of this aspect of the disappearance of big men.

Since the disappearance of big men, it is not so easy for poorer villagers to locate individuals from whom resources can be obtained, and households consequently cast their nets wider in terms of the social ties they call upon. In addition, there is a tendency for people to look to the government to act as a mechanism of social welfare. In large part, this is a legacy of the years of armed struggle, when free food aid distributions were part of the indigenous relief operation in "liberated" areas. From that time forward, there has been the expectation, if not the actuality, of continued food aid distributions from the state. Although Enda Mariyam has been

taken off the list of food aid recipient villages, Tegula village remains on the list. In some respects, food aid distributions in Tegula can be said to have filled the gap left by the disappearance of big men, insofar as they alleviate the pressures of the poor upon the rich, who can themselves no longer act as redistributive mechanisms in a manner comparable to the past.

The disappearance of big men from the village setting points to another aspect of land reform: namely, the fact that power can no longer be translated into the accumulation of productive resources and, conversely, that wealth can no longer be used to acquire power and status-honour. Whereas Hoben (1973: 230) could assert, just prior to the fall of the Emperor, that indigenous tenure "allocated people to available land in accordance with their social and political prominence", this is no longer the case. Rather, as Chapter 2 has outlined, land is now allocated to people primarily on the basis of household size. With power replaced by demography as the primary means of distribution, land resources have effectively been removed from the realm of political competition.

In severing the intimate connection between power, wealth and land that characterised the indigenous *risti* tenure system, the TPLF land reform served to promote equity in access to land and an egalitarian distribution of holdings. It also served, however, to introduce a degree of rigidity into the system, by reducing the scope of household wealth mobility. Although the dependence of the capital-poor upon the capital-rich was greater in Bauer's village of Hareyna than in Enda Mariyam of today, there was in Hareyna the possibility for a significant vertical mobility; the capital-poor and capital-rich were by no means fixed strata. As Bauer (1977: 2) observes:

... rather than unchanging stability, the village was in a condition of constant flux. People who had been born into rich households were now poor. Others who had come to Hareyna with nothing were now wealthy.

By disabling the mechanisms that once allowed ambitious men to significantly expand their control over land resources, the post-revolutionary land tenure system has made it impossible to accumulate wealth through crop production on a scale commensurate with the past. Rather, there are definite structural limits in the present technological and ecological setting and, under the present tenure regime,

on the amount of wealth that can be generated through agriculture. As noted in Chapter 4, the wealthiest household heads in Enda Mariyam today typically have some other form of income, in addition to crop production. Hence, the kind of wealth mobility described by Bauer in the late 1960s is no longer possible; households in Enda Mariyam no longer move up or down as dramatically along as wide a wealth spectrum.

In effect, the "fluid system of inequities" (Hoben, 1973: 231) that characterised *risti* has been replaced by a tenure regime that is more equitable but less fluid. That is, land resources no longer circulate with the same degree of dynamism as they once did. Unlike *risti*, where land resources frequently changed hands, in some cases dramatically in the aftermath of court disputes, land resources in the present day circulate far less frequently, in the context of *tabiya*-level meetings where individual plots available for distribution are provided to newly-eligible adults, or in the context of major land redistributions that occur every six to ten years. Indeed, the somewhat "bureaucratized" nature of land resource circulation may have been recognised by regional authorities when, as noted in Chapter 2, the decision was taken in 1992 to allow for land inheritance. Despite this change, however, there is still far less dynamism in the circulation of land resources at present than existed in the context of *risti*.

The dynamism of indigenous African tenure systems has been considered in a number of recent studies (see Bassett and Crummey, 1993; Downs and Reyna, 1988). Despite the inequities that grew up within them, it has nevertheless been shown that many indigenous systems provided a more flexible and open-ended access to land than was previously assumed. Rights in land under African tenure systems were typically less a function of strictly applied rules than the extent of power that individuals or groups could mobilise at any given time. Such flexibility was often lost in the transition to a new tenure regime, associated with the privatisation of land and the development of commodity relations (see Davison, 1988), or with the implementation of state-sponsored reform programmes (see Rahmato, 1993). In either case, rights in land tended to become more precisely circumscribed, and the ambiguities that facilitated the relatively fluid circulation of land resources were lost.

In some cases, the development of a new tenure regime served to alienate specific groups or categories of persons from access to land. Davison (1988: 20) notes, for example, how some African women lost inheritance rights in land in the context of commoditisation during colonial rule, as men pre-empted women's control of land for cash crop production. This is not the case in Tigray, however. On the contrary, as Chapter 5 has shown, by virtue of orienting rights in land toward individual adults, as opposed to household heads, the TPLF land reform provided for the *jural promotion* of women's rights in land. This has led to a much greater degree of autonomy within marriage and a greater degree of flexibility in marriage and divorce strategies.

Nevertheless, it is only in the context of land rental that it is possible to see a degree of dynamic circulation of land resources between households or individuals, in accordance with their productive capacities and assets. Perhaps for this reason, the land rental market in Enda Mariyam is alive and flourishing, although it expands and contracts in accordance with the post-harvest availability of grain and other production inputs. In addition to providing for the circulation of land resources in accordance with available resources, land rental also provides an important form of "safety net" for capital-poor households unable to cultivate their own holdings.

It is here that the argument in favour of a privatisation of landholdings in Tigray falls down. Although the above discussion may be assumed to lead to the conclusion that land privatisation is the best solution for the lack of present dynamism in the system, this is not the case. On the contrary, the experience of fieldwork in Enda Mariyam and Tegula suggests that privatisation would lead to the disappearance of the land rental market - which, in the absence of other options, represents the only livelihood guarantee for capital poor households within the village context - and the forced sale of land in the aftermath of failed harvests. Land privatisation would, in effect, deprive capital-poor households of their ability to recover a productive capacity in subsequent seasons, by eliminating the option of temporary land rental. Further, the primary aim of privatisation - to increase tenure security and hence promote investment in land quality and productivity - does not necessarily hold up in the Tigray setting. Rather, Tigray peasant farmers invest in land quality on rented plots in order to increase their chances of obtaining the same plot in subsequent years. That peasant farmers often invest in land in order to achieve greater security

of cultivation rights, rather than other way around, need not be dwelt upon further here. Given the external pressures to privatise land faced by regional and federal authorities, however, it is a subject that merits further study.

3. The Village, the State, and a Rural Development Project

In addition to distributing food aid in many *tabiyas*,¹⁰⁸ the state in Tigray is engaged in an ambitious programme of rural development aimed ultimately at increasing agricultural productivity. In these last two sections of the thesis, some aspects of the relationship between the village and the state are considered.

Thus far in the thesis, both the state and its development agenda have remained in the background of analysis, except in terms of the institutional reforms implemented by the TPLF. During the period of fieldwork, elections were held that formally established the Regional Government of Tigray. While opposition parties competed in these elections, many members of the Regional Executive Council were drawn from the TPLF. For the people of Enda Mariyam, the theoretical distinction between the TPLF as a political organisation and the elected regional government under which they live has little practical meaning. For villagers, it is the TPLF's government.

In this regard, the articulation of the village with the state is the articulation of village residents with the established structures of the same political authority under which they have lived since the advent of armed struggle. Political cadres based at *wereda* level who once mobilised peasants for the armed struggle, now work, together with *tabiya*-level cadres, to mobilise peasants for the "struggle for development." During the course of the war the TPLF made explicit efforts to support peasant livelihoods, in the form of a nascent relief operation and the establishment of rudimentary health and education facilities in "liberated areas". As noted in Chapter 2, the TPLF's attempt to link the success of armed struggle to the protection and promotion of peasant livelihoods went far toward mobilising rural support for its politico-military aims.

¹⁰⁸ Enda Mariyam was taken off the roll of *tabiyas* receiving food aid just prior to fieldwork, in consequence of its having generally better harvests than other areas such as Tegula.

Since the end of the war, support for peasant livelihoods continues to be a central feature of the regional government's agenda. That there is a continuing need for this support suggests that rural poverty in the ox-plough complex has proved more intractable than was previously understood. Although, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, traditional land tenure systems were once thought to be at the root of many of Africa's agrarian ills, it is now understood that in northern Ethiopia, the picture is more complex than that. Rather, rural poverty is linked not only to tenure arrangements but also environmental and ecological conditions, to population growth, and to the steady decline in soil fertility noted by Campbell (1991), amongst others, after many centuries of continuous agriculture. Thus, the demise of "feudal" privilege under the *ancien regime* and the establishment of a new land tenure system, while they served to promote a more egalitarian distribution of productive resources, did not by themselves signal the end of rural poverty.

At present, rural communities are mobilised by the state on the basis of the "struggle for development", rather than the "struggle against the Derg." This struggle includes, most notably, community-based and labour-intensive schemes for environmental rehabilitation, such as soil and water conservation. At present, peasant production and the relationship between production and environment have become key areas of scrutiny for the state. Indeed, contact between villagers in Enda Mariyam and representatives of regional government ("the state") occurs *primarily* in the context of rural development programmes.

During the last year of fieldwork, an incident occurred that shed light on the nature of the post-revolutionary relationship between the village and state. Although the thesis has not specifically concentrated on this relationship, it is worth detailing this incident in order to draw out some broader points.

As background to the incident, Chapter 3 noted that, in addition to arable land, each *tabiya* also typically has a *hazati*, or grazing area, set aside as a common resource for livestock. According to informants, the *hazati* in Enda Mariyam was established many generations ago and is managed by *tabiya* residents. In addition to the *hazati*, there is also *riste kofti*, or "land of the cattle." This is land suitable neither for grazing nor crop production and is an area where cattle rest or gather en route to the *tabiya* well. In general, the disposition of communal land resources within *tabiya*

boundaries is considered an emphatically local concern. Decisions as to how to manage communal land resources are taken by popular vote at *tabiya* meetings. In Enda Mariyam, with its small land area, this often involves striking a balance between the demand for farmland and the demand for grazing land. For example, a decision was taken in 1993 to open the *hazati* for grazing during the rainy season. According to informants, this had not occurred in living memory, since the *hazati* is always closed during the summer months to allow grassland to regenerate. However, pressure for more grazing land forced residents to decide to leave the *hazati* open.

An important contributor to pressure on the *hazati* was the fact that a small forest of *belis*, or wild cactus, had been closed off some three years earlier for regeneration. Typically, *belis* leaves are an important source of cattle fodder during the summer months. However, as part of the programme of environmental rehabilitation overseen by the *wereda*, *tabiya* residents agreed to the closure of the *belis* forest. In addition, every *tabiya* in the *wereda* established a community forest for tree-growing; the setting aside of land for the community forest further diminished the available grazing land in Enda Mariyam.

The incident occurred in June, 1994. In that month, representatives from the *wereda* Department of Agriculture approached the *tabiya bayto* to discuss a proposal for setting aside some land for the planting of a new grass variety that would be beneficial for livestock. The area being considered was *riste kofti*, lying near the new road that serves as an approximate boundary between the villages of Enda Mariam and Mai Woini. At a *tabiya*-wide meeting, the Department of Agriculture representatives outlined the details of the project as follows: payment in the form of a daily food ration would be available for a given number of people elected by the *tabiya* to be workers on the project. They would prepare the land for planting, plough and plant it, and provide security to ensure that the grass grew undisturbed by cattle in subsequent months. Once grown, the grass would be used to feed all livestock in the *tabiya*. The development aims of the project were discussed, including the benefits of new grass varieties for cattle health and fixing soil to prevent erosion.

The pros and cons of the project were then debated, a vote taken, and the proposal defeated. People said they voted down the project out of concern that no more land

be taken out of usage. As one farmer explained:

There much land already that our cattle cannot use. We don't want more taken. And how will we prevent the cattle from eating the new grass before it is ready? We will not be able to guard this grass (Gebre Medin Selassie, Farmer, Enda Mariyam).

Some weeks after this meeting, several political cadres from the *wereda* made a direct approach on behalf of the project to the residents of Mai Woini village. Although these cadres later insisted that the people of Mai Woini were convinced of the project benefits, residents of Enda Mariyam said that Mai Woini villagers had been "bribed" with the promise of food aid. In any case, on July 26 a dispute erupted near the road, as people from Enda Mariyam angrily confronted people from Mai Woini, who had begun ploughing up some of the *riste kofti* in preparation for sowing the grass seed. The situation became tense, and *shumagele* were called from both villages. Eventually, it was agreed to take the case to the *wereda*.

In discussions that night and during subsequent days, people in Enda Mariyam expressed their anger at the Mai Woini people, but greatest anger was reserved for the *wereda*, which had "gone behind the decision of the *tabiya*" to implement the project with one village only. Indeed, for many people the legitimacy of *wereda* government itself was at stake:

If they don't respect our decision, they don't respect our human rights, and we have struggled all these years for nothing. We will resist the *wereda* strongly on this. If we have to, we will take the case to Wolde Zenawi (Prime Minister) in Addis Ababa. If the *wereda* does not respect us, we will not respect them. We will leave this village and live somewhere else (Haleka Gebre Selassie Arafa, farmer and deacon, Enda Mariyam).

In late August, *wereda* representatives attended a *tabiya*-wide meeting to resolve the issue. When the meeting convened, there was a general surprise and satisfaction as the Chairman of the *wereda* Executive Committee himself was in attendance. The *wereda* Chairman began by making a long, formal apology to the people of the *tabiya*. He noted that the government had been wrong to convince the Mai Woini people after a decision by the *tabiya* as a whole had been taken, and that this was a mistake that would be corrected. He also noted that the people of Enda Mariam were right to insist on the validity of *tabiya* decisions, and to challenge the *wereda*.

He then made a counter proposal. Since the work had already begun, and since the grass would be beneficial to the community, he suggested that Enda Mariam people wait for some months until the grass was available for cattle, so that the benefit of the project could be assessed. If the people at that time still did not want the project to continue, the government would not insist. He then opened the meeting for debate. Eventually, *tabiya* residents voted to accept his proposal. After the meeting, some of the same people who had threatened to take the case to Addis Ababa expressed their satisfaction at the way the issue had been handled by the authorities. Specifically, they were pleased that the Chairman had, according to one informant, "respected us enough" to come himself. He said, "This is what we struggled for. This is our democracy."

There are a number of interesting things about this incident. First, it indicates that, despite feedback mechanisms for the incorporation of local concerns, contradictions do arise between community and government as to who has final authority to determine development priorities. This is not just an economic issue, or a matter for aid specialists. In Tigray, it is an issue intimately bound up with notions of "democracy". In a context where development programmes are one of the main forms of articulation between local and national level, it is in the way development proceeds, and who gets to make the decisions, that "democracy" is most frequently tested.

For the people of Enda Mariyam, the notion of "democracy" encompasses the ability to define and maintain development priorities according to local criteria. Although, in this case, *wereda* government showed a remarkable level of deference to local decision-making, this was as much a function of the competence and pragmatism of the *wereda* Chairman as anything else. Pressures to implement region-wide development targets are felt at *wereda* level, and these pressures militate against precedence always being given to local decision-making. The international aid industry is also complicit in this pressure. Local decision-making is time-consuming and does not always fall within project or programme cycles.

Second, the incident suggests there is a limit to the legitimacy of *wereda* and regional government development programming. More specifically, there is a certain boundary of intervention in the promotion of rural development - and especially the

management of local resources - which the state transgresses at its own risk. Scott (1976) developed the notion of a moral boundary that defines how far the burdens imposed by the state (or landlords, moneylenders or others) are tolerated by a peasantry. For Scott, such a boundary is defined by the subsistence ethic, in which all persons in the community are entitled to a minimum livelihood. Peasant notions of what constitutes legitimate versus illegitimate uses of power by the state are informed by the subsistence ethic, and the state is considered to have transgressed a moral boundary when its actions serve to deny the basic right to a subsistence livelihood. Although, according to Scott (1976: 25), peasants tend toward conservatism of response as a consequence of a "safety-first" approach, continuous transgressions of the moral boundary by the state may be grounds for rebellion.

In the same way, it is possible to suggest that there are limits on how far state encroachment into local resource management will be tolerated by peasants. Local control over communal resources has a long tradition in the region, and is considered a right as well as a necessity. Although, during the imperial period, national and regional elites made significant - and in the end unmanageable - claims upon the mass of the farming peasantry, control over how those claims were to be met was nevertheless a local prerogative.

As McCann (1995: 82) observes, the extraction of resources from the peasantry relied on prerogatives of the elite that did not touch farm production directly. Taxation and tribute were extractive rather than prescriptive, because they contained no direction or requirement as to how peasant households were to generate the necessary payments. Set against this historical background are the years during the armed struggle in which the state, in effect, ceased to exist for the majority of peasants in Tigray. Attempts by the state to renegotiate the balance between local control and wider developmental concerns are thus fraught, and - as the incident related here suggests - liable to various forms of challenge and resistance.

4. Challenges for the Future

To broaden the discussion further, we might ask what the incident implies for the future relationship between the village and the state. That is, we can ask what the incident says about the extent to which the state has succeeded, to use Hyden's (1980; 1983) term, in "capturing" the peasantry for its developmental agenda.

In the introduction to this thesis, reference was made to Hyden's notion of African peasantries as enjoying a greater degree of autonomy than peasants in Latin American and Asian, by virtue of the fact that their reproduction is less dependent on other social groups, including the state. In this regard, Hyden (1980: 9) asserts that "Africa is the only continent where the peasants have not yet been captured by other social classes."

Without wandering too far from the purpose, it is important to note here that Hyden's notion of an "uncaptured" peasantry in Africa has been criticised by other scholars. Part of this criticism stems from the implication of Hyden's work that "development can only take place if the social autonomy of peasants is removed by coercion" (Harriss, 1982: 344). Because capitalism has failed to achieve this, it is suggested that Hyden considers socialism as the main agent for modernisation. In this regard, Harriss (1982: 344) believes that Hyden's work "may be seen as a sustained apologia for the regime in Tanzania." However, this appears to skew the nature of Hyden's argument. Hyden's primary concern is with *modernisation*, not socialism *per se*. His work constitutes a detailed account of how peasants are able to evade modernisation, be it through socialist or capitalist pathways:

... peasants are inclined to give such strong priority to their own needs that the socialist government finds it difficult to incorporate them effectively into the modern development process... An independent peasant is no more easily convinced to become a socialist than a capitalist (Hyden, 1980: 223).

Although scholars such as Williams (1982: 381) claim they are "Taking the Part of the Peasants" in opposition to Hyden, the picture of peasant society they draw is not necessarily more accurate than the one drawn by Hyden. Indeed, Williams' description of peasant resistance to modernisation appears to directly echo Hyden's argument. He notes, for example, that:

... peasants lack any clear evidence that a transformation of their way of life along capitalist or socialist lines will ensure their security, improve their well-being, and extend their independence - and they find considerable evidence to the contrary (Williams, 1982: 394).

What appears most disturbing to Williams is not Hyden's characterisation of the relationship between state and peasantry in Tanzania but the policy implications of his approach. For Williams, Hyden appears to advocate particularly Western notions of modernisation and development that "have been achieved only on the backs and over the dead bodies of peasants or by the liquidation of peasants as a class" (Williams, 1982: 381).

If we leave aside a critique of the economic modernisation that Hyden appears to advocate for rural Africa, we can retain much of value in his analysis of the relation between village and state in the context of existing or historical development programmes. In this final section of the thesis, aspects of Hyden's analysis prove useful in considering the challenges for the future relationship between village and state.

Returning then to Tigray, it is possible to say that the Tigray revolution certainly succeeded in establishing a more direct formal linkage between the village and the state. As noted in Chapter 2, rural administration is based on a system of elected representatives "from the bottom up" designed to ensure a positive articulation between village-level interests and the agenda of the state, especially with regard to rural development. This structure, established during the period of the armed struggle, retains significant credibility in the eyes of village residents. In part, this is due to the legacy of the armed struggle itself, the success of which infused its associated institutional arrangements with a strong legitimacy. Further, the system still functions more or less as intended. Although some peasant households in Enda Mariyam are wealthier than others, there is little evidence for the ability of such households to transform wealth into political power. Nor is there evidence that local political administrators can transform political authority into wealth or privileges.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Indeed, during the first year of fieldwork, the *wereda* chairman was removed after allegations that he had used his position to acquire the materials to build a house. This, despite the fact that he is the brother of the Minister of Defense in Addis Ababa.

However, part of the reason why peasants participate in the present system of rural administration, and why it retains legitimacy, is the fact that it enables peasants to assert a degree of autonomy in the face of state power. The incident related above is an excellent illustration of this. Peasants have seized upon the notion of the "democratic" struggle to justify the protection of local autonomy, and are prepared to challenge the officers of state authority when they consider their "democratic" rights of local autonomy have been violated.

It is precisely this capacity for autonomy, however, that is a dilemma for the present state. Local autonomy ensures that the state's developmental agenda remains largely a matter of negotiation between the *wereda* and the village as to what projects villagers agree to participate in. As the incident above implies, people who do not agree with specific development projects may threaten to leave the village. When I asked informants if they were serious about their threats to leave Enda Mariyam if the *wereda* did not find an acceptable solution, they assured me they were in earnest and indeed appeared surprised that I questioned their resolve.

In similar ways to the peasants of Tanzania under *ujamaa*, the peasants of Tigray retain an essential autonomy because they retain, more or less, a mode of production independent of the state or other social classes. As Chapter 3 has shown, despite changes in the pattern of distribution of agricultural inputs, and despite the levelling down in wealth between households in the aftermath of land reform, peasants in Tigray produce in virtually the same manner as they did during the period of Bauer's fieldwork. Because they do not rely on other groups or on the state for the means of pursuing a livelihood, Tigray peasants have retained the capacity for "opting out" of broader agendas that do not directly concern them.

As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Hyden (1980) criticises socialist development in Tanzania on the grounds that the state did not succeed in integrating peasants into a wider development programme, such that development projects initiated by the state were of *immediate* relevance to the pursuit of peasant livelihoods. If we ask whether or not development projects are of immediate relevance to villagers in Enda Mariyam, the answer is "not necessarily". Although people in Enda Mariyam readily acknowledge the general importance of development projects, especially in relation to protecting the environment from

further degradation, their production and income-earning activities are not necessarily affected in any direct manner by the implementation of such projects, except in certain circumstances.

One of these circumstances is the requirement for a certain number of days of terracing work from every able-bodied adult in the village, during the dry season months from January to May.¹¹⁰ During the second year of fieldwork, when a poor harvest necessitated that many adult men migrate to the towns to earn income as unskilled labourers, a series of heated debates took place between *wereda* development cadre and village residents over the number of days terracing work that would be required. Attendance at the weekly *tabiya* meeting during this period was unusually high in comparison to "normal" weeks. Eventually, the *wereda* agreed to reduce the number of days in recognition of the need of many households for additional income generation. Another circumstance in which a development project impinged directly on household income was a dam-building project in the east of the *wereda* that offered food aid rations on a daily basis for workers. In my own neighbourhood of residence, a small group of young men heading newly-established households shared agricultural tasks with one another on a rotating basis to enable each other to earn food aid rations on this project.

While the discussion here is focused on longer-term development programmes, it is important to note that rehabilitation projects, including the loan of agricultural inputs such as seed, tools, and oxen, are designed to address the more immediate concerns of poorer households in Enda Mariyam. However, as noted in Chapter 3, residents of Enda Mariyam have more options for obtaining access to these inputs from within the village than do residents of, for example, Tegula village. Hence, state-sponsored rehabilitation projects tend to be of less interest to Enda Mariyam residents than residents of Tegula. Tegula residents also benefit directly from continued food aid distributions, whereas Enda Mariyam residents do not.

¹¹⁰ Since the end of fieldwork in 1995, this requirement has apparently been dropped, as most community-based terracing work has been completed.

In general, rural development programmes in Tigray rely heavily on voluntarism and community-based action. Rural development agendas are discussed and modified in the context of public - usually *tabiya*-wide - meetings. Although all able-bodied adults are expected to attend these meetings, in practice it is usually a small number of people in Enda Mariyam who do attend, unless there is an issue of particular relevance to local concerns on the agenda. While *wereda* and *tabiya* executive committee members work hard to convince people to come to meetings, they rely on persuasion rather than force to promote attendance. During the period of fieldwork, there was no evidence that political authorities resorted to force in their relations with local communities. Indeed, the legitimacy of district and regional government *depends* - in the aftermath of a democratic struggle - on the lack of resort to the force which the state monopolises.

Rather, rural development cadre must coax and cajole and convince. Although there are many examples of enthusiastic involvement of peasants in specific development initiatives,¹¹¹ in general the institutions of rural development rest lightly upon village society, and are formally but not substantively integrated. To paraphrase Hyden (1980: 210), peasants are usually so overwhelmed with the immediacy of making ends meet that they have little time and attention for participation in formalised structures of development planning.

Moreover, peasants have their own mechanisms for dealing with the problems of ensuring a livelihood, and managing local affairs of immediate relevance to their lives. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the dictates of ensuring a subsistence livelihood are central to peasant concerns, and constitute the day-to-day reality through which events are filtered and evaluated. However, many of the processes of peasant social life geared toward subsistence livelihoods are invisible to development planners because they operate at informal levels. Some of these - notably the ways in which households gain access to productive resources such as oxen - have been outlined in this thesis in a systematic way for the first time. Chapter 5 also highlighted the local mechanisms for settlement of property upon divorce that have an immediate bearing on the prospects of the two separate

¹¹¹ In Tegula, for example, villagers were very interested in construction of a series of small check dams that would prevent gully formation in the immediate area.

households that are left. In this regard, formal processes of development planning do not necessarily capture people's attention in the village, because there are other processes of more immediate relevance to involve them. As Hyden (1980: 215) observes with regard to Tanzania:

In recent years, there has been considerable discussion about the need for popular participation in local development efforts... (However) peasants have their own institutional networks which keep them preoccupied. Although these in most instances are unregistered and thus do not exist in the list of formal organizations, they are important to the peasants because they are integral parts of the prevailing pre-capitalist formations. Their existence means, of course, that peasants do participate in local affairs. The issue is how far peasants are willing to participate in the formal structures that link them with the wider policy-making system. Most peasants do not consider that such participation is as important as their involvement in local, informal structures... the wider system is not important in the context of their production system.

This is not to suggest that established structures of policy-making, which are explicitly designed to involve local communities in development planning and implementation, are not legitimate. Rather, it is to suggest that as long as these structures rely on peasant interest and participation in processes that do not affect their *immediate* concerns, they may not retain their legitimacy into the future. In a context where development projects do not necessarily touch upon immediate livelihood concerns, there is a danger that participation in the development process becomes performance. This is especially so in a context where "the struggle for development" is intertwined with the political agenda of the state, and with the forms of association between state and village. During *tabiya* meetings, it is already possible to detect individuals who are less interested in substantive debate about the pros and cons of different proposals than in the public demonstration of loyalty to the state. Although the legacy of the armed struggle is still robust, and the processes to which it gave birth are still respected, appeals to the "struggle for development" may lose their potency as time goes on, and the circumstances of the original struggle fade from memory.

Hyden (1980) describes a broadly similar scenario in the former Portuguese colonies of Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique where, as in Tigray, national liberation movements succeeded in mobilising widespread peasant support. These movements were able to articulate their political aims in such a way as to resonate

with peasant demands for a concrete improvement in their lives. However, retaining the support of the peasantry in the post-war development process was more problematic, as Hyden (1980: 202) observes:

(In Guinea-Bissau) it has been a major task to keep peasants supporting the demands of the new PAIGC government after independence. The peasants were struggling for their cause, which prior to independence was similar to that of the liberation movement. After 1975, the government was forced to place demands on the peasantry in the same way as any other modern government. It has been necessary to encroach on peasant autonomy in order to obtain enough resources to support the development demands... (In Mozambique) peasants are still independent enough as producers to ignore the demands placed on them by the new regime. The latter tries to minimise the friction by insisting that "the struggle continues" (*al lotta continua*).

In this regard, one of the challenges for the present regional government is how to maintain the legitimacy of ruling structures, insofar as these structures recognise the rights and interests of peasants, while at the same time fully incorporating the peasantry in a meaningful way into the broader development process.

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APPENDIX 1 - METHODOLOGY

This appendix provides details of methodologies used during fieldwork. It is broken into four main sections. Section 1 provides an overview of the methodological approach. Section 2 considers practical matters, such as the choice of research site and various issues related to living arrangements, language, and local perceptions of the research. Section 3 describes the qualitative methods used, and Section 4 describes the quantitative methods. Contents of this appendix are as follows:

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Section 1: General Approach

1.1 Overview

Fieldwork was carried out from February 3, 1993 to February 6, 1995. In general, the research methodology included a combination of structured investigation based on survey instruments, less structured investigation based on in-depth interviews on a particular issue or practice, and participant observation. Given the lack of information available on Tigray social life, it was considered that a mixture of methodologies was needed. Moreover, given the extent to which agricultural production, economic transactions, and management of household resources dominated the day-to-day concerns of people in the research site, more structured survey work was carried out than originally planned, comprising roughly half of overall fieldwork.

1.2 A Focus on the Household

Harris (1981) has rightly warned anthropologists against universalist assumptions creeping into the notion of "the household", and especially the unproblematic conflation of "household" with "family". Holy (1996) also warns of the danger of assigning to households in other societies a privileged social status similar to that of "households" in northern industrialised countries, to the neglect of other kinds of social groups.

With these dangers in mind, the Tigray household was nevertheless a central focus of much of the research. During fieldwork, households constituted key units of investigation, especially in terms of subsistence production, exchange relationships, and social practice more generally.

There are two main assumptions in this approach. The first is that there is a commonality of interest among members of the same household, such that "the household" can legitimately be spoken of in certain circumstances as a coherent unit of social action. The second is that individual households are autonomous to

the extent that they can legitimately be isolated as distinct social and economic units from other kinds of groups.

Both of these assumptions were justified in the Tigray case, not in terms of universalist notions about co-resident families, but in terms of the particular features of Tigray village society. Normally, the household as co-resident unit operates under the direction of the household head, who has unquestioned authority over all members. This means that it is appropriate in many instances to speak of "the household" as a coherent unit of social action, especially in the context of the livelihood strategies households pursue.

At the same time, any household member can simply walk out if they are unwilling to submit to the authority of the household head, often taking with them the resources that they individually control. In this respect, one of the aims of fieldwork was to "unpack" the household in terms of the rights and resources normally under the control of individual members.

In addition, fieldwork confirmed the importance of the household relative to other kinds of social groups. This was understood from a review of the literature prior to fieldwork, and formed the basis for the methodological approach. Observations during the course of fieldwork served to confirm the validity of the household as a central unit of investigation.

1.3 Exploring "the Past"

Because my primary research interest was the local implications of institutional reform, I spend a significant amount of time during fieldwork asking questions about what things had been like "in the past", or "before", meaning during the time of Emperor Haile Selassie. The aim of such questions was to elicit a detailed picture of social life that would enable comparisons with the present. Given the paucity of ethnographic studies on peasant society during the late imperial period, it was not possible to obtain information about the pre-revolutionary period in any way other than by asking.

Such questions did not appear, in this particular setting, to involve an artificially-constructed division between present and past. On the contrary, "the past" is voluntarily evoked by the people of Enda Mariyam themselves. Comparisons of how things were *kidam* ("before"), meaning during the time when the *risti* land tenure system was in operation, as compared to *hazi* ("now") were frequently heard, especially from older informants.

In this regard, the past continues to have a visceral existence in the village. Although livelihoods are still pursued in much the same way as thirty years ago, the institutional arrangements of village life have undergone radical reform since the late 1970s under the auspices of the TPLF. For the people of Enda Mariyam, these reforms constitute a central reference point in the interpretation of their present circumstances, as well as the constructions they build of the past, and the predictions they make of the future.

However, asking questions about the past involves explorations into the social construction of memory. In a context where there has been a radical change in political structure and leadership, information from informants will be coloured by their own experiences and interpretations both about the past and about the present in relation to the past. An example is the fact that the size of a person's former landholding could be roughly correlated with their attitude toward land reform; those who gained tend to describe the past in darker terms than those who lost.

Further, the inequities and hardships of the past are frequently evoked by political leaders as a means of emphasising the achievements of the present. Hence, many people provide, on first account, a "politically correct" and fairly superficial description of what the past looked like, and it is only upon further questioning about specific social arrangements that a hint of the day-to-day realities prior to the revolution emerge.

Responses to questions about the past were treated cautiously. Where information concerned the operation of a particular institution or practice, it was cross-checked with different key informants. Where information was related to attitudes and perceptions, these were used as a means of insight into the past and present position

of the informant, and how cultural concepts might have changed meaning over time. In general, oral testimonies about the past made it possible to construct a picture of the main features of social life and social organisation in the pre-revolutionary period. Though not accurate in all respects, "model-building" about the past has proved necessary in order to qualify specific changes that have occurred.

Section 2: Research Site, Living/Working Arrangements

2.1 Choice of Enda Mariyam

This section considers some of the more practical aspects of how fieldwork was carried out. With regard to site selection, in December 1992 I surveyed three *weredas* as possible locations for fieldwork, including: Enda Batshama, Dega Geralta, and Dega Tembien.

I used a number of initial criteria used for selecting these *weredas*. For practical reasons, they should be reasonably accessible by four-wheel drive vehicle. They should also be either highland or mid-highland in altitude, representing the most densely settled and intensively farmed regions of Tigray. They should also have a history of administration by the TPLF for a significant number of years, in order to examine the impact of TPLF-sponsored institutional reforms.

I chose Dega Tembien *wereda* for two reasons. The first was the entirely practical consideration of being able to access the *wereda* during both dry and rainy season on an all-weather road. The second was the very positive impression made during an introductory interview of the *wereda* chairperson. Since I would be initially reliant on this person for support, and later for continued permission to remain in the field site, the ability of the *wereda* chairperson to grasp the nature and purpose of the research was important. Moreover, I felt that this chairperson, who was both a skilled administrator and an articulate spokesperson, would in time become a key informant, as indeed happened. Also, the southern part of the *wereda* had been under TPLF control for long periods of time during the war.

I moved to the *wereda* capital, Hagre Selam, in late January 1993 and spent the next several weeks travelling to various *tabiyas* to select a village site. Upon visiting Enda Mariyam *tabiya*, located at the southernmost tip of the *wereda*, I was introduced to the members of the *tabiya* executive council, and again formed a very positive impression. Since the *tabiya* came under TPLF administrative control early in the war, local government structures were strong and well established. Moreover, the *tabiya* had a monastery, two churches, and school for training priests. Hence, the influence of the Ethiopian Orthodox church on *tabiya* life would also be strong. The existence side-by-side of pronounced structures of traditional and revolutionary authority in the *tabiya* seemed to offer a unique opportunity.

Further, Enda Mariyam had just been taken off the roll of *tabiyas* receiving food assistance from the regional government. Before arriving in Tigray, the aim was to find a research site that had been severely drought-affected and famine-affected during the 1980s. This aim was modified, however, upon arrival in Tigray, when it became clear that such *tabiyas* would almost certainly be continuing to receive food aid. I decided that food aid constituted a confounding factor that would cloud the study of local strategies for resource management. Given that several *tabiyas* in the east of the *wereda* were still on the food aid roll, it would in any case be possible to do some comparative work in these sites.

Within the *tabiya*, I chose to concentrate work in Enda Mariyam village for a number of reasons. First, it was easily accessible by an all-weather road being constructed from Hagre Selam south to the town of Abi Adi. Second, it was the site of the church, the monastery, and the *tabiya* meeting place. Finally, it was the most populous village in the *tabiya*. I moved to Enda Mariyam village on February 3, 1993.

2.2 Comparative Work in Tegula

Having decided that some comparative work should be done in the eastern part of the *wereda*, I visited several areas. In February 1993, I arrived at Eyenambirkakin *tabiya*. Here I met with members of the *tabiya* executive council. The chairperson of the *tabiya* proved to be an extremely articulate and thoughtful man, who later became a

key informant. Within the *tabiya*, Tegula is the largest village; within Tegula village, I chose the largest neighbourhood to focus on, also called Tegula.

Details of surveys and information gathering carried out in Tegula are provided in the appropriate sections below. As a rough estimate, I spent approximately 15% of total research time in Tegula. This included general observations, as well as investigation of specific issues for which it was considered important to have a comparative perspective. The village was approximately 45 minutes by car from Enda Mariyam, making daytime visits possible.

2.3 Living Arrangements

In Enda Mariyam village, I was offered three options for residence by three different households. I chose one in the neighbourhood of Endabazbanom, based primarily on the quality of the house offered, and the fact that it was a separate dwelling within a compound (the others were shared dwellings). I considered a separate dwelling important to be able to invite guests and conduct interviews with key informants in private. Also, the household head, Tekle Himinut Yohanis, had been wealthy during the imperial period, and had adult sons who were active in local government. One of them, living separately from his parental household, was on the *tabiya* executive council. This connection, I felt, would prove useful in obtaining information about the workings of local administration.

It was agreed that I and my research assistant would eat our evening meal with the household, and I gave Tekle Himinut's wife, Kidan, enough cash each month to cover this cost. Morning and mid-day meals were prepared and eaten by myself and my research assistant in my dwelling. Initially, a tent was set up next to my dwelling for the research assistant; later, a separate house in the compound was constructed by neighbours, for cash payment. The process of house building proved an interesting way to observe how income-earning opportunities are portioned out among friends and neighbours. Being able to leave behind a new dwelling, which the household could not have afforded to build on its own, was also important in showing gratitude to my "parental" household. For water supply, I purchased a donkey and gave it to

another household in a different part of the village, who had offered me a living space, which I declined. In exchange for the gift of the donkey, the daughters of this household brought me water from the village well once or twice a week.

A significant amount of initial time was spent simply sitting around the compound of my parental household, and observing domestic and other kinds of activity. Since the household retained a relatively high status in the village as a consequence of Tekle Himinut's past wealth, the compound was a busy one. Each evening after dinner, at least three or four men (and sometimes their wives) from neighbouring households would arrive at our compound to exchange gossip. These evening gatherings were extremely important for hearing local concerns and interests, and for testing out ideas.

During the period of fieldwork, I had use of a four-wheel drive vehicle. Every two weeks or so, I would travel to the regional capital, Makele, to buy provisions. For each of these journeys, there was fierce competition among village residents to ride with me, since this would save 4 or 5 Ethiopian birr in transport costs. Having limited the number of travellers to six people per journey, I appointed a neighbour to act as manager of the vehicle. His responsibilities included selecting six people to ride with me, according to criteria that were discussed and agreed during a village meeting. Sick or elderly people received first priority, followed by any others who had urgent business in the town; people who wanted to travel to Makele for social or trading purposes were given lowest priority. Choices for each journey were then checked with me.

Inevitably, conflicts arose, especially between my expected loyalty to members of my household and immediate neighbors, and others in the village or the *tabiya*. Priests and especially monks also had claims to preferential treatment that were difficult to ignore. The lengthy and acrimonious process required to make a single journey to Makele did not lessen during the entire period of fieldwork, but the stress this created was compensated for by the insights it provided into how villagers ranked each other in terms of status and claims to special favours.

Throughout fieldwork, villagers continually applied to me for gifts or loans. In general, I tried to avoid these requests, especially given the tendency of villagers to associate

me with international aid organisations (see below). However, as a "rich" person in the village, I was expected to fulfil at least some obligations of assistance to others. As far as possible, I did so according to criteria that were locally appropriate. My immediate household had the highest priority, followed by close friends and neighbours, and then others in the village of high status. I remained living with Tekle Himinut's household for the entire period of fieldwork.

2.4 Language and Research Assistants

Prior to leaving for Ethiopia, I studied the Tigrinya language for four months in London. This was of limited value. Since Tigrinya had for many years been suppressed in favour of the national language, Amharic, it was difficult to find a Tigrinya speaker skilled in language teaching, or a written system of Tigrinya grammar and vocabulary. The only text available was written by a Swedish missionary, who produced a lengthy document on Eritrean Tigrinya. This document used English explanations, but presented Tigrinya words in Gi-iz script (Inter-Mission Language Study Centre, 1968).

Nevertheless, a photocopy of this document was made, and a Tigrinya speaker hired to transliterate all Tigrinya words into English characters. This document also proved to be of limited value, especially in relation to idiosyncratic village Tigrinya. Later, during a trip to Asmara, an English-Tigrinya dictionary was purchased which was somewhat more useful (Tuquabo Aressi, 1987).

I spent the first month in the village without an interpreter, in order to establish relationships on my own, and immerse myself in the language environment. After the first month, I hired two research assistants who worked with me for a period of six weeks and nine months, respectively. Both of these were young male high school graduates living in Makele. Unfortunately, the English capacity of both was inadequate. In November 1994, I traveled to Addis Ababa to locate a college graduate from Tigray who would have better English skills and succeeded in finding a young woman who had grown up in a village in the neighbouring *tabiya* to Enda Mariyam. This woman, Teberah Germai, worked with me from early December 1994 until the

end of fieldwork in February 1995, and functioned as both interpreter and research assistant.

Throughout the period of work with Tebereh Germai, I continued to practice my language skills. I achieved a basic level of competency that enabled me to ask questions, comprehend the general shape of responses, and follow the gist of conversations. However, I never achieved sufficient fluency to conduct interviews wholly on my own. Most field investigations were conducted together with Tebereh. Her presence had additional advantages. She had been born in the neighbouring *tabiya*, and was related to several people in Enda Mariyam. Hence, she was able to check the accuracy of certain kinds of information. Her engaging manner was also invaluable in establishing relations of trust.

2.5 Local Perceptions of the Research

My presentation of the nature of my work to people in Enda Mariyam and Tegula was as follows: I was working to obtain an academic qualification; I sought to learn as much about village life as possible for my own private purposes; I would, upon completion of the fieldwork, produce a long report and possibly a book about what I had learned, using aliases for people and place names if that was deemed important by my informants.

Although many people in the village, and especially close friends and key informants, accepted this explanation, initially it was not much credited. Since the only experience villagers had of foreigners, and especially those with white skin, was with representatives of international aid organisations, I was automatically placed in this category. I was seen as someone who had been sent to help the village with food aid or other kinds of assistance. Indeed, just before leaving the village at the end of two years of fieldwork, a number of people congregated outside my door to ask when I would be distributing the blankets they had been told were stored inside my house.

Further, villagers had had experience of international aid personnel conducting surveys to determine how to target limited resources. Hence, villagers were adept at

projecting an image of severe poverty to outsiders, and anticipating which questions could be used to assess their wealth situation.

My apparent identity as aid-giver was a significant obstacle to be overcome during fieldwork. Many of my key informants were chosen not only for their knowledge of village life and ability to speak about their own society but also because they understood my actual purpose in living in the village. For other people, the only means available to me to combat assumptions was to be consistent in repeated explanations of the nature and purpose of my work. I also became skilled at knowing when people were obfuscating on questions linked to wealth. I made repeated enquiries about the same topics at different times, in order to check the reliability of the information provided.

Nevertheless, gaining the trust of informants about the reason for my investigations was, in the end, only really overcome through time, and was one of the main reasons for remaining in the village two full years. It was only during the second year of fieldwork that many people began to realise that I was, indeed, working for private purposes, especially when they saw over time that no aid was forthcoming. The implications of this for other kinds of survey work, and especially surveys linked to aid projects, are profound. Typically, aid organisations conduct relatively short surveys and assume they obtain reliable information because the purpose of the survey is carefully explained to respondents beforehand. My own experience suggests such explanations are wholly inadequate to convince respondents, and that they cannot be used as an assurance of the reliability of data gathered in this way.

With regard to the issue of "acceptance" by village people, the most important action I took - inadvertently - was to purchase 300 plastic *sewa* (beer) cups for the Mariyam church in December 1993. I had been approached by several village elders to do so, with the promise of repayment at a later time. When I waived repayment and presented the cups as a gift to the church, my status in the village changed markedly. While I had anticipated that my provision of rides for sick or elderly people to Makele would be the main factor in being "accepted", it was rather my recognition of the importance of the church, and my contribution to elevating its grandeur relative to other churches in the *wereda*, that proved more meaningful. Subsequently, I was

called to the monastery and given a Tigrinya name by the monks. Shortly thereafter, I noticed that, when referring to me in the third person, I was called "*gwual adina*", meaning "the daughter of our village", rather than the more generic "*ferenji*" (foreigner). After this time, I was more careful to attend church services whenever possible, especially on religious holidays.

2.6 Relations with Political Authorities

Having spent many years as a relief worker in Tigray on the non-government side of the conflict, I was a well-known person to political authorities in the TPLF, and subsequently the regional government of Tigray. This was extremely useful in obtaining permission to conduct the research, especially since it constituted the first external, in-depth investigation of village life since Bauer's work in the late 1960s (see Bauer, 1973). It might also have drawbacks, however, in the sense that political authorities might expect a sympathetic portrayal of local political processes, and might expect the research to be of immediate, practical value in policy formulation.

In order to guard against these expectations, I consistently explained to authorities in regional and *wereda* government that the research was undertaken solely for my own academic qualification, and that, while it might prove useful, I could not guarantee that this would be the case. This appeared to be well understood, and I was never at any time during the fieldwork placed in a position of having to justify the work in practical terms, or to demonstrate political loyalties or sympathies in a particular direction.

At village level, I was careful to hide my previous relations with political authorities in the TPLF, to avoid being seen as someone who would report negative comments or practices to local authorities. I also went out of my way to establish relationships with those in the village who were considered by local authorities to be politically conservative, and worked to establish a relationship with key figures in the church and the monastery. To some extent, my association with authorities at *wereda* level was unavoidable, since I was introduced to the village by the chairperson of the *wereda*, himself a long-time TPLF fighter. However, I did not to my knowledge experience any instance where my presumed association with *wereda* authorities appeared to

influence the nature or extent of information provided to me by informants, over and above the normative reticence of giving any information to an outsider. Far more problematic than any idea of my political sympathies was my automatic association with international aid agencies, discussed above.

Section 3: Qualitative Methodologies

3.1 Overview

Qualitative methods used during fieldwork included participant observation, in-depth interviews with key informants, and focus groups. In addition, a wealth ranking exercise borrowed from the techniques of Participatory Rural Appraisal was used, as was an attempt to draw a schematic chart of neighbourhood social networks.

3.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation was a major part of fieldwork, involving my presence during most of the activities of the village. The length of time spent in the field also enabled me to be present at many events that I might otherwise have missed, had I remained in the village for only one agricultural season.

In general, I divided my household-based observations into roughly equal parts for agricultural production (primarily a male sphere) and domestic production (a female sphere). With regard to the former, originally I had an idea that this might include farming my own small plot of land. However, the general shortage of land and oxen in the village would have made this extremely difficult, and taken too much time away from observing the farming activities of villagers themselves. In addition, I also participated in and observed all of the main celebrations and religious holidays of the village, and either myself or my research assistant attended most of the *tabiya* meetings held on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

Living with a household provided an excellent means of participant observation of intra- and inter-household relationships. During my period of fieldwork, the youngest

son in the household separated from his parental household upon marriage, and I was able to witness all of the stress and conflict normatively associated with this process. The eldest son of the household (who had his own household) and the middle son also had a long-running conflict with each other, which was solved during lengthy and sensitive negotiations brokered by elders (*shumagele*), which I was allowed to attend. The middle son of the household was also involved in a court case concerning the division of property on his divorce. In this respect, I was inadvertently lucky in my choice of household residence.

I also travelled both within the village and to neighbouring villages when activities were occurring that I wanted to observe first-hand. So, for example, I attended a number of weddings, funerals, christenings, and other types of social gatherings.

Participant observation in Tegula was far more limited than in Enda Mariyam, and was restricted to activities I could observe on the day of my visits. In general, research in Tegula comprised interviews with key informants, focus group discussions, wealth ranking, and survey work (see next section).

3.3 Key Informant Interviews and Focus Groups

Detailed interviews with key informants did not really begin until the second year of fieldwork, when I had identified people who both understood the nature of my research and who were able to speak in abstract terms about their society. Out of 12 such people, five in particular stand out. These were people to whom I not only brought questions about village life, but with whom I also tested my own interpretations and ideas, and discussed possible further directions for research. All such interviews were recorded on tape.

In addition to one-on-one interviews with key informants, I also conducted group interviews with select people about particular topics: for example, farmers, women, the *tabiya* executive committee, and the *tabiya ferdi bayto* (justice committee). Further, I sometimes initiated interviews or discussions with groups of people who gathered socially in my homestead in the evenings. Most of these interviews were

also recorded on tape. Overall, I recorded 51 hours worth of taped interviews and group discussions.

3.4 Wealth Ranking Exercises

During the first six months of fieldwork, after all neighbourhoods in the village had been mapped and the names of the household heads listed, I conducted a number of wealth ranking exercises in both Enda Mariyam and Tegula villages. The procedure for these exercises was taken from Grandin (1988), and involved a basic pile sort technique. This exercise was conducted with 12 different informants in Enda Mariyam, and with three informants in Tegula. Responses from informants exhibited a remarkable similarity in ranking, especially at the wealthiest and poorest ends of the spectrum.

Information obtained from wealth ranking exercises was extremely useful in pointing to the qualitative differences between households of different wealth situation, and in providing insights into local conceptions of poverty and wealth. In addition to the basic exercise, I also conducted a similar exercise in Endabazbanom, where informants were asked to rank households according to their wealth situation ten years ago, and during the last days of the imperial period. Although some younger households had to be excluded from this exercise, it was nevertheless useful for indicating trends in wealth situation over time.

3.5 Charting Social Networks

In July and August 1994, a survey was conducted among all households in Endabazbanom (42 households) aimed at understanding the kinds of networks that exist for mutual assistance, labour exchange, and other kinds of support. Questions asked included who the informant's close friends were, who regularly attended their monthly *mezeker* (saint's day celebration), who they asked for help when they had a problem, and who they would call as *shumagele* (elder) or *wahas* (guarantor) to broker a dispute or witness an exchange agreement. Such questions were directed to

the household head, while a more specific set of questions was asked of all women, including both household heads and wives. These included questions about who provided mutual help in routine domestic tasks such as grinding grain and fetching water. The aim of breaking down questions in this way was to be able to identify some of the specific networks for mutual assistance that exist among women.

Names of individuals in Endabazbanom or elsewhere in the village (or the wider *wereda*) were then noted, and the relationship to the informant asked. This question was phrased as "How do you call this person?". The aim of asking the question in this way was to obtain the specific kin or friendship term applied to that person. In this way, the use of various terms become apparent: for example, although one's *haw* are normally one's close kin, this term was also frequently applied to close friends.

Two test surveys were conducted prior to starting this survey. As a result of these tests, although questions about one's close friends were kept, questions about one's enemies were dropped, as this caused significant agitation and suspicion among informants about the reasons for such questions. Moreover, there was a strong reluctance to declare an enemy publicly. Questions about who would be called as *shumagele* also created some agitation, as informants were anxious to demonstrate that they had no conflicts with anyone in the village (even when this was known not to be the case). Nevertheless, the question was kept, since some informants were forthcoming about this kind of information.

Responses were analysed in terms of a schematic chart indicating lines of exchange or reciprocity or friendship between households. This chart was never completed, however. Very quickly, lines indicating social networks became extremely confused, and the chart virtually unreadable. One of the key values of this lay in comparing this (unreadable) chart to a similar, relatively straightforward chart produced by Bauer in the late 1960s. The work also provided a great deal of indirect insight. The general reluctance of people to answer the questions, and the suspicions concerning why I would need such information, pointed to the extent to which households must manage a myriad of complex social relationships, and the sensitivity to having these relationships charted or exposed in too fine a detail.

Section 4: Quantitative Data Collection

4.1 Rationale for Quantitative Data Collection

Fieldwork included a significant amount of quantitative data gathering. This was done for two reasons. First, at the time fieldwork began, there was a virtual absence of any reliable baseline indicators for rural households in the *wereda* - and indeed for Tigray overall. Although some studies at household level had been carried out by various ministries under the previous government, these did not physically reach into rural areas, then controlled by the TPLF. The TPLF on its own account conducted a number of household-level surveys in areas under its control during the war. Aside from difficulties of language and access, however, these were sufficiently unsystematic in both methodology and geographic scope to make their use problematic.

During the period of fieldwork, both the regional government and international aid organisations were moving quickly to address the absence of data on rural areas. The most notable of these efforts was a survey on the food economy of northern Ethiopia conducted by Save the Children UK (1993), and a survey on household food security conducted by the Relief Society of Tigray.

Second, it became apparent during the initial period of fieldwork that economic concerns and economic transactions were a key aspect of Tigray social life. To understand why people in Enda Mariyam operated in their specific social context in the way that they did, I would need to know more about farm and household economies. Since this information was nowhere available in the form required, I would have to generate it myself.

In some respects, having to generate my own baseline data had the advantage of enabling me to design surveys that spoke directly to the socio-economic practices I witnessed on a day-to-day basis, rather than relying on pre-established formulas. At the same time, for the Farmer Survey in particular, I also consulted agricultural economists at the USAID office in Addis Ababa, as well as agricultural consultants passing through the region whenever possible.

4.2 Issues in Reliability

Given the initial association of my presence in the village with the provision of aid, the reliability of survey data collected was a key concern. This was tackled in a number of ways, including repeated questioning of the same informant at different times on the same subject to test consistency, checking with other households and especially neighbours, and cross-checking information in a more general way with key informants. Further, I questioned people in Tegula village about practices and circumstances in Enda Mariyam, and vice versa. In many cases, this kind of cross-checking was very useful in confirming or fleshing out information.

By the second year of fieldwork, I also became fairly adept at recognising when information from a particular survey was likely to be unreliable. In general, even when survey data was likely to be unreliable, the process of conducting the survey itself was of immense value in pointing out areas for further investigation, and providing insights into the way people conceptualise their social world.

4.3 Overview of Data Collected

Not all quantitative data collected during fieldwork is outlined here. A number of surveys covering specific topics such as migration, landlessness, and landholdings during the imperial period were carried out, but have not been fully analysed. This is because they did not produce data of a quality that could be considered reasonably reliable.

A more reliable survey was conducted during the second year of fieldwork for prices in the Hagre Selam market. Prices for major crops and livestock were gathered each Saturday at the same time of day, by a secondary school teacher resident in the town, Alem Tshai. Her work was checked by me each Saturday afternoon and recorded in a logbook. Additional notes were also recorded concerning Alem's impressions of market trends and events. Prices for the entire year of 1994 were obtained. However, little of this price information proved to be of immediate relevance to the thesis and will not be considered further here.

Of more relevance, and detailed below, was a household survey carried out in order to obtain basic indicators such as landholdings, livestock, other assets, and farm practices. Also discussed below was the work carried out with six case-study households in my neighbourhood of residence, Endabazbanom. Although not all of the data collected from these two sets of surveys has been used in the thesis, together they constitute a key source of empirical knowledge about social life.

4.4 Household Baseline Survey

After an initial six months residence in Enda Mariyam, a household survey was undertaken during July and August 1993 to obtain baseline indicators. All households located in three out of the six neighbourhoods in the village were surveyed: Mahel Geza, Endabazbanom, and Adi Lem. Together, these comprised 128 out of a total of 228 households in the village, excluding monks resident in the monastery. In December 1993, the same survey was carried out in Tegula neighbourhood of Tegula village, including all 51 households. A list of questions asked in the survey is attached at the end of this appendix.

Survey questions were asked by me and responses interpreted for me by my research assistant. Interviews were conducted inside the household with the household head; as far as possible, the spouse of the household head was also present, and as many other household members as possible. Where the household head could not be located upon repeated visits, the spouse was interviewed. This occurred in four cases. Interviews lasted from two to two-and-a-half hours per household.

For the purposes of the survey, a "household" was defined as any group of people who live in a shared dwelling, eat together, and pool economic resources. In the case of the marriage of a son or daughter, where that son/daughter had not yet separated their grain supply from the parental household, they were included in the parental household survey; where his/her grain had been separated, he/she and their spouse were counted as a distinct household. In cases where there were several married

couples sharing the same compound, distinct households were identified as those that stored and maintained their own separate grain supply.

All households in both Enda Mariyam and Tegula village were mapped prior to conducting the surveys, and a list of the names of all household heads produced, so that a location number could be obtained for each survey form. Ten test surveys were carried out among randomly chosen households prior to finalising the survey form and starting the work. Survey analysis was done in Makele using a statistical programme called EPI5. Basic frequency analysis was carried out for the most important indicators (see Appendix 8).

Reliability of information from the household surveys is considered to be high, and the survey provided the basis for many subsequent surveys. Information on livestock ownership in particular was cross-checked with neighbouring households, as was information on loans, land rental, and arrangements for ploughing. With regard to landholdings, the normative distribution of one half *gibri* share of land per adult, and one quarter *gibri* of land per two children allowed for cross-checking against the composition of the household, obtained during the start of the interview. However, as will be seen further below, the reliability of data on land actually farmed, and on crop yields from such land, is always questionable when obtained from surveys of this kind.

Prior to leaving the field, a second round of surveys was conducted during November and December 1994, with exactly the same households as were included in the baseline survey, but for Enda Mariyam village only. The aim was to obtain information about changes in household composition and livestock ownership after a full agricultural year had passed. The questionnaire used in the follow-up household survey was shorter than the original, but otherwise the same methodology applied. This survey is also considered highly reliable.

4.5 Surveys With Case-Study Households

Six "case-study" households were chosen in Enda Mariyam in order to study household economies more closely. All of these were located in my neighbourhood of

residence, Endabazbanom. This enabled me to access them quickly and regularly, and to check information I gathered with other people in the neighbourhood.

As a general criterion, households were chosen that had a basic understanding of the nature of the research and were able to converse readily about their circumstances. More specifically, two households were picked from each of the wealth categories of rich, middle, and poor as defined by informants in wealth ranking exercises. Two of the households were headed by women. The aim of stratifying households in this way was to note differences in household economies according to wealth situation and gender.

For all six households, life histories of the household head were obtained. A detailed survey of landholdings was then conducted, as well as a detailed account of agricultural inputs and outputs for the 1994/95 season. In addition, three out of the six households were chosen for further investigation. These comprised a poor, middle, and rich household, and included one woman-headed household. For these three households, detailed surveys of household budgets and food consumption were conducted. Each of these activities is described below.

Farmer Survey with Six Households:

The Farmer Survey began with an attempt in 1993 to measure the total landholdings of each of the six case-study households. In some cases, a household held only three or four plots; in others, they held as many as 10 different plots. Initial interviews in June 1993 with each household head identified how many plots each household held, and where they were located. Measurements were then taken by pacing the length and breadth of each plot, and calculating square meters according to an average pace length.

Halfway through this work, however, it became apparent that farmers had not disclosed all the land they held. When asked why not, responses were given as follows:

That is only a small piece of land, and we didn't think you would be interested in it.

That piece of land is just behind my house, so I left it out.

We have a problem telling about all our land, even to each other. Even if we want to, we can't speak.

In order to overcome the reluctance to disclose landholdings, I used various techniques. This included conducting interviews with household heads when adolescent children of the household were present. Since the children tended to be more forthcoming, I was able to obtain additional data in this way. In some cases, I also pretended to have prior knowledge of plots that I did not, in fact, know existed. This sometimes worked to trick farmers into admitting to additional plots. (Rather than annoying informants, this technique actually amused them, by implying that I had become as tricky in this matter as they themselves).

In addition to physical measurements, I also obtained information about how each plot was held. This included who in the household held the land, and whether or not it was held as *ferehot*, meaning jointly with other households. If land was *ferehot*, the share of inputs expected from the case-study household, and the share of yields that would be taken, were noted. The location of each plot, the quality of the land, and the crop variety planted in the previous year, were also recorded.

Once I obtained what I felt was an accurate record of all the plots of each of the six households, I began a detailed agricultural input/output survey. For each plot, I noted the number of labour and oxen-days used in ploughing, weeding, and harvesting, and the amount of seed, fertilizer, and insecticide (for storage) used, if any. Where land was rented in or out, inputs provided by the landholding household were recorded, as well as any loans or gifts exchanged. For *ferehot* land, the share of inputs provided by the case-study household was recorded.

Input information was obtained through repeated interviews, during regular visits to each case-study household during the period when discreet agricultural activities

were taking place. In general, the information is considered to be reliable, not only because of repeated questioning but also because inputs to agriculture in a given year are well remembered by informants, who were also not reluctant to provide such information.

Outputs in the form of crop and straw yields from each plot were then recorded. Whereas information about straw yields (or shares of straw, in the case of *ferehot* or rented land) were freely provided, this was not the case with crop yields. Rather, informants were reluctant to provide this information. In order to record yields accurately, I hired the middle son of my own household to be physically present on each plot of land at the time when grain from the threshing floor was measured into sacks. This man, Gaysay, had been trained early in 1994 as a political cadre for the *wereda* and had both a substantial authority in the neighbourhood and a group of close friends who were willing assistants in the work. I checked Gaysay's information by visits to each household's granary as soon as possible after the harvest was finished. This method provided what I consider to be a reliable record of crop yields. I also preferred it to the more conventional method of measuring stalks and heads on a square metre of land, since crop diseases, flooding, and pest infestations tended to damage crops right up until the time of threshing. Any grain or pulses obtained prior to threshing, by picking or threshing by hand, were also recorded and added to the yield total for each plot. Households in Enda Mariyam often obtained some grain and pulses in advance of the harvest this way, in order to stretch food supplies.

The Farmer Survey has not yet been analysed in detail, especially in terms of the findings of the agricultural input/output record. I plan to carry out further work in this regard in future. Meanwhile, the insights gathered from conducting the survey, especially in terms of agricultural practices and the day-to-day workings of the farm economy, inform the thesis throughout.

Budgets with Three Households:

Also informing the thesis, but not yet fully analysed, is the detailed work carried out with three of the six case-study households. The aim of this work was to calculate a

reasonably accurate estimate of annual household income, consumption, and expenditure. Also, whereas the Farmer Survey obtained information relating to a predominantly male sphere of activity, household budget surveys related to a predominantly female sphere.

Data was collected in a variety of ways. For each household, interviews with women were carried out concerning estimated annual consumption of items that could not be produced on the homestead but had to be purchased in the marketplace, such as kerosene or soap. Further interviews were conducted concerning annual gifts to the church (in cash or grain, or as prepared food), and grain used annually in religious observance.

In addition, for each of the households a weekly record of income, expenditure, loans received and given, and gifts received and given was recorded for the period May 9 to September 24, 1994, and again from January 30 to February 5, 1995, comprising a total of 22 weeks. These interviews were carried out on Sunday or Monday, in order to record sales or purchases in the Saturday market in Hagre Selam as accurately as possible. Data from this weekly record is more reliable for some things than others. Sale of grain by the household was almost always recalled in detail, whereas the purchase of small food items or other necessities was less easily recalled.

A record was also made of all items in the "richest" household, including domestic items such as cooking utensils, and agricultural equipment. The function of each item, the length of time they could be used before replacement, and the cost of replacement, were recorded. The aim of this work was to obtain an idea of the cost of establishing and equipping a household. The costs of hosting different types of ceremonies or practices were also obtained, including a wedding, a funeral, an *arbah*, a *teskar*, and a christening, by means of interviews with women in each of the three households. Whenever I was actually present at one of these events, I also obtained extra information about what it cost.

With regard to food consumption, a detailed record was kept of all food consumed by each of the three households every day for a week, for three week-long periods: May 9 to 17, 1994; August 21 to 27, 1994; January 30 to February 5, 1995. These

represent a period of "normal" grain supply (May), a period of "scarcity" just prior to the harvest (August), and period of "abundance" just after the harvest (January/February). Interviews were conducted each morning about the previous day's food consumption. Amounts of each food item eaten were estimated in local measures, which were later converted to metric measures (see Appendix 4).

The initial aim of the survey was to be able to extrapolate annual food consumption for the three households. However, this was not possible, except in very general terms, since it cannot be known how representative each week's food consumption is for longer periods in the year. Nevertheless, the food consumption survey proved useful in establishing the ratio of different kinds of grain consumed by each of the three households, and the better quality of grains consumed by the rich as compared to the poor. The survey also indicated how households reduce food consumption to stretch food supply, and the difference in degree of such reductions for households of different wealth situations. I plan to make use of the data obtained in these surveys in future.

LIST OF QUESTIONS ON HOUSEHOLD SURVEY FORM

Location No: **Form No:** **Date:**

Name of Respondent:

- 1. Who is the household head?**
- 2. What is the household head's main occupation?**
- 3. List all members of the household:**
- 4. Are there any other people residing in the household?**
- 5. Are there any hired workers living in the household?**
- 6. How many years ago was this household established?**
- 7. Where was the head of the household born?**
- 8. Where was the spouse of the household head born?**
- 9. Are there any members living outside the household?**
- 10. What other households did you belong to before this?**
- 11. Has the household head lived outside the village?**
- 12. Give details about the houses in the compound:**
- 13. Give details about the land held by each member of the household:**
- 14. How much land did the household have during the time of Haile Selassie?**
- 15. How many oxen does the household have?**
- 16. How many oxen did the household have one year ago? Two years ago?**
- 17. Does the household keep any oxen for another person?**
- 18. Does the household keep any other livestock for another person?**
- 19. Give details about which of the following animals the household has:**

| | total now: | 1 year ago | 2 years ago |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
|--|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|

cow

calf

bull

sheep

goat

donkey

mule

chicken

beehive

20. How many trees does the household have?
21. When did the household start to have trees?
22. When was the last time the household sold any trees?
23. Will the household rent out land to anyone this year?
24. Did the household rent out land to anyone last year?
25. Will the household rent land from anyone this year?
26. Did the household rent land from anyone last year?
27. How will the household plough this year?
28. How did the household plough last year?
29. What will the household plant this year?
30. For each crop, where will seed be obtained from?
31. Did anyone in the household do any paid work this year? Last year?
32. Did the household pay anyone to do work for them this year? Last year?
33. Does anyone in the household ever travel outside the village for paid labour?
34. Did the household borrow money or grain this year? Last Year?
35. Did the household loan any money or grain this year? Last Year?
36. Did the household receive any gift from the government this year? Last?
37. Give details of all marriages of the household head:
38. Give details of all the marriages of the spouse of the household head:
39. In how many places in the household landholding?
40. Does the household ever use a cow or a bull to plough?
41. Did the household sell any animals this year?
42. Did the household buy any animals this year?
43. Did the household have any animals die this year?
44. Will the household leave any land fallow this year?
45. Are there any adults living in the household who have not yet received an adult share of land?
46. Has the household grain supply finished? If yes, when did it finish:
47. List in order of importance the strategies the household uses to fill the gap in grain supply:
48. Additional notes or comments:

APPENDIX 2 - TRANSLITERATION OF TIGRINYA WORDS

There is to date no standardised system of transliteration for Tigrinya words into English characters. In 1995, discussion began in Makele about the formation of an Institute of Tigrinya Language Studies that would, among other things, undertake this task, but this had yet to be established at the time of writing. Because there is no standardised system, every author appears to make use of his/her own system: some of these use phoneticisation more common to Italian speakers, and some more common to English speakers.

I have chosen to adopt, with modification, the transliteration system used by John Winfield Bruce in his 1976 doctoral dissertation, "Land Reform Planning and Indigenous Communal Tenures: A Case Study of the Tenure 'Chiguraf-Gwoses' in Tigray, Ethiopia" (Bruce, 1976). This system uses phoneticisation more common to English.

Tigrinya words are comprised of a series of consonant sounds, usually three, to which vowels are attached that modify the consonant sound. There are seven orders of vowels, and 31 consonant sounds presently in use, resulting in a total of 217 letters.

In the glossary provided in Appendix 3, Tigrinya words are set out with the appropriate diacritical marks added to indicate pronunciation. Following Bruce's example, these are omitted in the text of the dissertation, since they are disturbing for the reader. Unlike Bruce, however, there are some liberties taken in the textual presentation of words. The main consonant order is preserved, but where the sixth order of vowel appears, which is usually silent, it is replaced in the text by an English vowel or combination of vowels that approximates the most accurate pronunciation. Where the sixth vowel appears at the end of a word, or in the middle of a word where it need not be included for pronunciation purposes, it is dropped. In some words containing the consonants K, K', k', or e, these may be replaced in the text by h, a, ah, or eh; TS is sometimes replaced by t or s.

The Tigrinya alphabet and transliteration characters used are set out below. Diacritical marks for consonants and vowels given here are modifications of Bruce's system, in order to make computer-based printing easier. Consonants no longer in common usage have been omitted from the alphabet, including the 4th, 6th, 15th, 19th, and 34th consonants. Vowel orders are listed from left to right, and consonants from top to bottom.

vowels

consonants

| | e | u | i | a | e' | / | o |
|----|---|---|---|---|----|---|---|
| h | ሀ | ሁ | ሂ | ሃ | ሄ | ህ | ሆ |
| i | ለ | ሉ | ሊ | ላ | ሌ | ሎ | ሐ |
| h | ሐ | ሑ | ሒ | ሓ | ሔ | ሕ | ሖ |
| m | መ | ሙ | ሚ | ማ | ሜ | ሞ | ሙ |
| r | ሪ | ሩ | ሪ | ሪ | ሪ | ሪ | ሪ |
| s | ሰ | ሱ | ሲ | ሳ | ሴ | ሶ | ሰ |
| k | ቀ | ቁ | ቂ | ቃ | ቄ | ቅ | ቆ |
| k | ቀ | ቁ | ቂ | ቃ | ቄ | ቅ | ቆ |
| b | ቦ | ቦ | ቦ | ቦ | ቦ | ቦ | ቦ |
| t | ተ | ተ | ተ | ተ | ተ | ተ | ተ |
| ʃ | ቸ | ቸ | ቸ | ቸ | ቸ | ቸ | ቸ |
| n | ነ | ነ | ነ | ነ | ነ | ነ | ነ |
| ʒ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ |
| e | ከ | ከ | ከ | ከ | ከ | ከ | ከ |
| k | ከ | ከ | ከ | ከ | ከ | ከ | ከ |
| k | ከ | ከ | ከ | ከ | ከ | ከ | ከ |
| w | ወ | ወ | ወ | ወ | ወ | ወ | ወ |
| e | ወ | ወ | ወ | ወ | ወ | ወ | ወ |
| z | ዘ | ዘ | ዘ | ዘ | ዘ | ዘ | ዘ |
| ʒ | ዘ | ዘ | ዘ | ዘ | ዘ | ዘ | ዘ |
| y | የ | የ | የ | የ | የ | የ | የ |
| d | ደ | ደ | ደ | ደ | ደ | ደ | ደ |
| j | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ |
| g | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ |
| t | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ |
| ʃ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ |
| p | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ |
| tʃ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ |
| f | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ |
| p | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ | ገ |

APPENDIX 3 - GLOSSARY OF TIGRINYA WORDS

This glossary includes words that appear in the text of the thesis, as well as other Tigrinya words commonly used in Enda Mariyam. The transliteration of each word as used in the text is provided first, followed by the transliteration including diacritical marks in parenthesis. Spellings, transliterations, and definitions of words were obtained mainly from local informants and research assistants, although some definitions referring to older land tenure systems have been taken from Bruce (1976), and Bauer (1973). Where exact definitions have been difficult to obtain, the best approximation of meaning is given.

abaha (eabeəK'e): fenugreek.

abat nefsi (eabat/ nef/si): literally, "father of the soul". Refers to the priest who performs confession for an individual or for all members of a household.

abay (eabay/): a lazy or weak ox.

abet (əabe't/): unit of measure.

abi seb (eab/y/ seb/): literally, "big person". Connotes one who is considered in high regard in the community, and who commands status-honour (*kibr*).

abo (eabo): father.

adi (əadi): can be variously glossed as "village" or "community"; may also used to connote a *tabiya* (see also *kushef*).

af gebela (eaf/ gebela): addition to a *hidmo*, built as an extension outward and forming a large entrance area. Used for sleeping or entertainment.

ahewat (eah'/wat/): siblings. Also refers to those kin with whom a person has a close and mutually supportive social relationship.

ahkor (əak'or/): dry manure.

ahlet (əale't/): "chain". Refers to a chain of descent used to trace links to a founding ancestor, for the purpose - prior to land reform - of establishing *risti* rights to land, or for establishing the extent of purity of ancestry of a prospective bride or groom.

ahmawti (əamaw/ti): remembrance day for a dead relative.

ahsha (əasha): foolish.

ahssa (əaTSa): barley variety. The word is also sometimes used as synonymous with *kerkata*, a mixture of *ahssa* barley and wheat.

ahtsid (eaTSid/): cutting crops.

ahwdi (ahw/di): threshing. Also used as synonymous for the threshing floor.

alemawi (ealemawi): in the world. Connotes those who live in the realm of the world, as opposed to those who live outside the world in the realm of religious contemplation and spirituality; for example, monks.

alkway (eal/Kay/): horse bean.

arbah (ear/baea): remembrance party that should be held 40 days after the death of a relative. Fairly strictly observed in Enda Mariyam village, although the size of the party may be small, according to the wealth situation of the household (see also *teskar*).

argi (ear/gi): donkey.

arki (ear/ki): friend. See also *fetawi*.

ashmolemalo (eash/mol/malo): wheat variety.

asrat (eas/rat/): literally, "a tenth". Used in the present day to mean "tax", but during the imperial period connoted a tithe levied on farmers, which was incorporated in 1967 into income tax.

atbiya danya: (eabiya danya): local judge or magistrate, prior to the establishment of local justice committees (*ferdi bayto*) under the TPLF, appointed by the imperial Ministry of Justice.

ater (eater/): pea.

ato (eato): basic form of address to a man; can be glossed as "Mister".

azazi (eazazi): one who orders, as, for example, a father to a son who has not yet established his own household.

azmera (eaz/mera): "small" rains that arrive between late February and early April. Also known as *belg*.

baal geza (b/eal/ geza): "owner of the house". Connotes the person who built the compound, or in some cases the person who has acquired ownership through inheritance or purchase.

bahkel (bae/k'el/): a mixture of clay and sandy soil.

bahli (bah/li): customary practices, often glossed as "culture".

bahrzaf (bahrzaf/): tree.

bahtawi (bah/tawi): religious ascetic.

bahti (bah'ti): first day of each month in the Ethiopian calendar.

balabat (*balabat/*): refers to an ancestor who founded a *risti* estate within which one resides. (See also *kenyi*).

barna (*bar/na*): small conical basket used for various purposes in food preparation, and for carrying seed during sowing.

barya (*bar/ya*): slave.

bayto (*bay/to*): can be glossed as "court". Refers to *wereda* or *tabiya*- level judicial bodies, also known as *ferdi bayto*. During the war, the word *bayto* was commonly used to refer to local, elected administrative councils formed under the TPLF. These councils are now known as *mikre bet*.

beahl (*beəal/*): holiday. Often used in reference to saints' days in the monthly calendar. See also *nahmetu*.

begeh (*begie/*): sheep.

behkli (*bek'/li*): mule.

belg (*belg*): refers to crops grown during the period of the *azmera* rains; such crops are uncommon in Enda Mariyam, but are sometimes grown in Enda Michael village.

belis (*bel/s*): cactus.

beray (*b/e/ra/*): ox.

berbere (*ber/bere*): ground red pepper.

bete seb (*be'te seb/*): literally, "people of the house". Refers to persons who live together and share common resources. Can be generally glossed as "household".

betri (*bet/ri*): staff carried by men.

birkinet (*b/r/k/net/*): a form of marriage, wherein both partners bring an approximately equal amount of property to the marriage. The only type of marriage allowed by the TPLF during the armed struggle, and presently the formal legal requirement for all marriages in Tigray.

bogbogta (*bog/b/g/ta*): first weeding.

borshin (*b/r/sh/n/*): lentil.

bun (*bun/*): coffee.

chama (*CHama*): shoes.

chefera (*CHefera*): a person who entertains at a social gathering by singing humorous or slanderous songs.

chehwaro (*CHK'<w>aro*): pick with metal blade and wooden handle, used for turning soil by hand.

chenadam (CHenaeadam/): spices.

chew (CHew/): salt.

chida (CH/da): ploughing done just prior to sowing.

chiguraf gwoses (CHiguraf/ gwoses): tenure system wherein land rights were based on residence rather than descent. Also called "land share" system. See also *risti*.

chika shum (CHiKa shum/): headman or official in charge of a *tabiya* during the imperial period

chimchmo (Ch/m/ch/mo): sauce made from ground lentils to be eaten with *enjera*; may also include peas, horse beans.

chret (CH/ret/): fly whisk used by older men or priests.

chuwa (Chuwa): "pure". Connotes those persons who do not have any blacksmith ancestors.

dahana (dah'/na): "we are ok". Often used to mean a person or household in the middle wealth category, able to manage without assistance.

da haser (da h'aser/): building in a compound, round in shape and usually with thatched roof, used for storing straw and grass.

da mogogo (da mogogo): building in a compound, round in shape and usually with thatched roof, used for cooking and food preparation.

da mokolo (da moK'/lo): building in a compound, round in shape and usually with thatched roof, use for grinding. Also called *da metehan* (da meT/h'an/).

das (das/): temporary roof made from wood and thatching, used to cover a cleared space where a celebration or meeting is held.

debes (debes/): a gift (usually food) given to a household whose member or relative has recently died.

debri (deb/ri): building in a well-to-do compound, erected over a *hidmo*, and most commonly used as guest quarters or for entertaining.

debtera (deb/tera): unordained but highly trained clergyman, associated with powers to produce medicines with special powers for healing, or for causing sickness.

dega (de'ga): highlands, above 2500 meters.

deheri geza (d/h'/ri geza): "behind the house", connoting a kitchen garden or area for growing food items on land around the homestead.

dejen (dejen/): to back up, or backbone. Connotes the *wereda* government, or the regional government in Makele.

dekha (d/k'a): poor. Commonly used in reference to a person or a household.

deki (deki): children

den (den/): forest.

denbe (den/be): fenced enclosure within a compound used for livestock.

derar (d/rar/): the evening meal.

derebo (derebo): having one's landholding in two places. Also means a second, additional plot of land one receives during a distribution (see also *mud* and *salsay*).

dorho (dor/ho): chicken.

durki (d/r/Ki): drought.

durkwe (d/r/K<w>e): cut, dried grass.

eawyat (eaw/yat/): calling out the name of a person who has died, to alert others in the village.

edaga (e/daga): marketplace.

edag (e/d/g/): connotes the purchase of oxen days with straw or grass.

edul (e/dul/): can be glossed as "fate". (See also *rihus*).

ehba (eiba): wet manure.

ehkili (e/k'ili): grain.

eitay (eitay/): form of address to a nun, or elderly woman without husband as a sign of respect.

ekeba (e/Keba): conservation.

elgenet (e/l/g/net/): relationship between godparents and godchildren.

encheti (e/n/CHe'ti): dry wood, leaves, or twigs used as fuel for cooking.

enda (enda): can be glossed as "place"; for example, Enda Mariyam, or "place of Mary".

endati (e/n/dae/ti): small bunches of newly cut grain, which will be gathered together into *guboh*.

engwaya (e/n/g<w>aya): vetch.

enjera (e/n/je'ra): the staple bread, made from a fermented batter of various grains, including some amount of *taf*, pouring onto a hot plate and cooked.

"enjeraha kikyhid eyu" (e/n/je'rak'a k/ k'/k'ed/ e/yu): literally "your bread will go". Connotes the loss of wealth.

enkaah (e/n/Kaəa): unit of measure.

eno (e/no): mother

ensasa (e/n/s/sa): innocent, as in animals; not aware or capable of evil.

entati (e/n/TaTie/): linseed.

ezi (e/zi): an order to the household of your son-in-law to come and plough your land, in exchange for food and drink. Typically can only be made once.

feda (f/da): misery, hardship, or a bad occurrence that casts a gloom of bad luck over oneself and possibly one's descendants.

fekera (fek'era): a person who entertains at a social gathering by singing farcical, boastful songs, usually about themselves.

felasi (felasi): monk.

felasit (felasit/): nun.

felsi (fel/si): tree nursery.

ferdi (f/r/di): judgement.

ferdi bayto (f/r/di bay/to): judgement council, or court (see also *bayto*).

ferehot (fereK'ot/): Connotes a landholding held by two or more persons, who each contribute seed and labour, and take a share of the crop and straw yield, in proportion to their holding.

ferenji (feren/ji): foreigner, or non-Ethiopian. Often used in the village to connote a white-skinned person.

fetawi (fetawi): can be glossed as "ones who like/love each other". Refers to a close friend, either male or female.

feteh (f/t/h'/): divorce.

fetsamit (fetsamit/): executive body or group.

finjal (f/n/jal/): small porcelain cup used for drinking coffee, and also as a unit of measure.

gaah (gaeat/): special grain porridge served to a woman for seven days immediately after childbirth.

gabi (gabi): cotton shawl of four thicknesses of material, typically made by spinning raw cotton in the home and paying a weaver to construct the garment.

gasha (gasha): guest.

gebar (gebar/): usually glossed as "farmer", but means more specifically an adult holding their own share of land, upon whom taxes can be levied.

gebechere (gebechere): "impure". Connotes those who have a blacksmith ancestor.

geber (geber/): *enjera* made without *taf*.

gebeta (gebeta): unit of measure.

gebeta nifki (gebeta n/f/Ki): unit of measure.

gebez (gebez/): member of the clergy responsible for co-ordinating prayers.

gebre selam (g/b/re selam/): a *teskar* for Christ, performed after Easter by a small proportion of households in Enda Mariyam in the richer wealth category. Seen as an indicator of piety and morality.

gedeba (gedeba): terracing.

gene (gen/ei): large clay vessel used for making and holding *sewa*.

genzeb (gen/zeb/): money. Also frequently used to mean "cattle".

gerdena (g/r/d/na): can be glossed as "servant marriage", prevalent during the imperial period and presently outlawed, in which a woman comes to a household as a wife, but brings no property to the marriage, and has no claim to any of the property acquired by the household during the marriage.

gesho (ge'sho): ground hops used to prepare *sewa*.

geza (geza): house.

gibi (g/bi): compound of a homestead.

gibri (g/b/ri): a share of land, the actual size of which varies from village to village.

gibri asrat (g/b/ri eas/rat/): land tax.

gifi (g/f/ēi): injustice, violence, or atrocity.

gimgimat (g/m/g/mat/): payment (usually in cash) by a husband to a wife for half the value of houses in the compound, upon their divorce.

gimit (gim/t/): purchase of oxen days with cash.

gizat (g/z/t/): prohibition enacted by priests. Refers most commonly to a prohibition on work during a particular religious holiday. Formally outlawed under the TPLF, but still operating in the present day as an informal moral pressure from priests.

gobez (gobez/): clever.

godo (godo): large clay vessel for storing grain, especially grains with small kernels such as *taf*, that would otherwise leak from storage baskets (see also *sherfa*).

gojom (gojom/): large scythe, used for digging up weeds and roots (see *golgwol*).

golgwol (gol/g<w>al/): digging up large weed clumps or roots on a plot of farm land.

goma (goma): plastic drinking cup.

gorebet (gorebe't/): literally, "close house". Can be glossed as "neighbours" or "neighbourhood". Includes all the residents of a single *got*, or those living in the immediate vicinity of the homestead.

got (goT/): sub-unit of a village, that can be glossed as hamlet or neighbourhood, comprising a distinct cluster of homesteads. (See also *gorebet*).

goyta (goy/ta): title of respect, meaning "my lord".

grat (g/rat/): plot of land.

guboh (guboeo): a pile of many bunches of cut grain, placed together with a stone on top, to be left for several days to dry before constructing large mounds of drying grain with heads placed inwards (see *kumri*, *kulsas*, and *nahrī*).

gujeley (guj/le): group. Usually refers to work groups, for example in terracing work.

guji wutsa (guji w/TSae/): "new hutted ones". Refers to the situation of a newly married couple who have formally separated from their sponsoring (usually parental) households and are sleeping in their own building in a compound.

gumbar (g/m/bar/): literally "forehead". Connotes a Front, as in Tigray People's Liberation Front.

gumgum (gemgam/): evaluation.

gwual (g<w>ual/): daughter

gwult (g<w>u/lt/): used to refer to a form of land rights during the imperial period. More precisely, the right to govern a locality and take all or the major part of the tax revenue from that locality; also, the locality subject to such rights.

habesha (h'abesha): "mixed people". For Enda Mariyam villagers, the word connotes a person from Ethiopia, as opposed to a foreigner (*ferenji*).

hadar (h'adar/): marriage.

hade gibi (h'ade g/bi): literally, "one compound". Denotes people who live together in the same compound.

hade mugogo (h'ade mogogo): literally, "one cooking house". Denotes people who cook together and share the same cooking house.

hafti (h'af/t/): sister. Also refers to those female consanguines with whom a person has a close and mutually supportive social relationship.

haftum (haf/tam/): rich. Used commonly in relation to people or households.

hagay (h'agay/): dry season, from approximately early February to early June.

hagre (hager/): country.

hagre seb (hager/ seb/): "country people". Connotes the peasantry.

haleka (haleka): deacon.

hamat (h'amat/): for either male or female, a relational term for one's mother-in-law. It is considered normative for the relation between a female and her *hamat* to be tense and conflict-ridden, whereas the relation between a male and his *hamat* will be close and familial.

hambasha (h'/m/basha): baked bread made from wheat.

hamed (h'amed/): soil.

hamuy (h'amuy/): for either male or female, a term for one's father-in-law. It is considered normative for the relation between a male and his *hamuy* to be tense and conflict-ridden, whereas the relation between a female and her *hamuy* will be close and familial.

hamza (ham/za): sandwich made from *kicha*.

hamza senbet (ham/za sen/bet/): gift of bread provided to the church monthly from each neighbourhood.

hanfets (han/feTS/): Refers to a mixed variety of crop, such as wheat and barley. A word not commonly used in Enda Mariyam. (See *kerkata*).

harestay (h'ares/tay/): farmer.

harestay rbah (h'ares/tay/ r/bae/): literally, "farmer one-fourth". Refers to a system of hiring agricultural labour during the imperial period, when a farmer would contract to work for one year, in exchange for one-fourth harvest from the land he ploughed.

haresti (h'ares/ti): money lender.

haser (h'aser/): straw.

haw (h'aw/): brother. Also refers to those male consanguines with whom a person has a close and mutually supportive social relationship, and who are called "brother". The word is also used more generally to refer to close kin, typically including siblings of either sex, parents, grandparents, mother's and father's siblings and their children, and step-siblings raised in the same household.

hayli (h'ay/li): strong, forceful, or powerful.

hazati (h'azae/ti): community grazing land in a *tabiya*, managed and regulated by the *tabiya*.

hazen (h'azen/): literally, "sad". Refers to the act of sitting outside a person's home whose spouse or relative has just died, to show respect and concern.

hazi (h'zi): now. May also be used to refer to the present day.

hegumgum (h'/gem/gam/): saying bad things about a person to others in private.

hemak getse (h'/maK/ geTS/) literally, "bad face". Connotes one who gives the impression of an angry or untrustworthy character.

hersha (h'/r/sha): farming.

hersha meret (h'/r/sha mere't/): farming land.

hibishti (h'/b/sh/ti): baked bread made from wheat, prepared for special religious, especially Easter.

hidmo (h'/d/mo): building in a compound, used for sleeping and entertaining guests, or for grain storage.

hige (h'/ge): law. The word has a more formal connotation than *serit*, in the sense that is enforced by the state.

hige mengisti (h'/ge men/g/s/ti): law of the government.

hoho (hoho): threshing by driving oxen around the threshing floor.

hutsa (h'uTSa): sandy soil.

jebena (jebena): coffee pot.

jedid (jedid/): shawl made out of synthetic material, and purchased in the marketplace (see also *kuta*).

kahbo (k'ae/bo): unit of measure.

kalsi (K'al/si): struggle. Connotes the armed struggle from 1975 to 1991; also used, according to the context, to refer to the struggle for democracy or the struggle for development.

kefer (kefer/): unit of measure, also refers to a large basket used for temporary grain storage.

kefti (k'ef/ti) cattle.

kenyi (Kenyi): the founder of a *risti* estate.

kerkata (ker/kae/ta): a mixture of *ahssa* barley and wheat, usually the *ashmolemalo* variety. The most common grain both produced and consumed in Enda Mariyam. Sometimes referred to as *ahssa*.

keshi (K'eshi): priest.

ketema (ketema): town.

ketema seb (ketema seb/): "town people".

kewhe (K'ew/e/): harvest season, from approximately mid-October to early February.

keyeh (K'ey/h/): red. Refers to red soil found in some parts of the village.

keyeh taf (K'ey/h/ Taf/): red *taf*, one of two varieties grown in the village (See also *tsada taf*).

kibri (k/b/ri): respect or honour. Glossed as "status-honour" in the text, following Bauer (1973).

kibur (k/bur/): respectable or honourable. Also denotes "expensive" or "dear".

kicha (K'/CHa): thin bread typically made from *kerkata* and sorghum, used to prepare *sewa*, or eaten alone on special occasions.

kidam (K/d/m): literally, "before", but often refers to "the past", meaning prior to the coming of the Derg and land reform.

kilom (k/lom/): "their religion". Connotes land held by the monastery during the imperial period.

kitab (k'/tab/): refers generally to medicine, but more specifically to a tree root cut and tied in an amulet around one's neck, as protection from evil.

klite gebeta (k'/l/te gebeta): unit of measure.

kola (kola): lowlands, between 1600 and 1300 meters.

kole (K'ole): disease that afflicts women when they do not obtain things to make them attractive, such as butter for the hair or new clothing.

kolo (K'olo): snack made from roasted or fried wheat kernels and peas.

koribom (K'oribom/): one who has taken holy communion. Connotes the close or enduring relationship of a husband and wife who have taken communion, and thereby promised to be faithful and not divorce.

korkoro (Kor/Koro): tin or aluminium roof.

kremti (k'/rem/ti): rainy season, from approximately early June to mid-October.

kuhli (kuh'/li): blue eye make-up used by women on special occasions.

kulsas (k'ul/sas/): medium size mound of drying grain, with heads placed inward in a circular pattern, left for several weeks on the land to dry before threshing.

kumri (k'um/ri): very large mound of drying grain, with heads placed inward in a circular pattern, left for several weeks on the land to dry before threshing.

kurban (K'ur/ban/): holy communion.

kursi (K'ursi): the morning meal.

kushet (K'ushet/): an administrative unit that can be glossed as "village", comprising a number of *gots*.

kuta (k'uta): cotton shawl of two thicknesses of material, usually made from spinning raw cotton in the home, and then paying a weaver to construct the garment. (See also *gabi*).

kwankulu (k<w>e'n/kulu): unit of measure.

kwanta (K<w>an/Ta): dried meat.

lahmi (lah'/mi): cow.

lamba (lam/ba): kerosene; used as fuel for lamps comprised of bottles with cloth wicks.

leboba (leboba): the third and final weeding.

lejagered (l/jagered/): virgin.

lemat (l/m/eat/): connotes development.

leykwa (le'K'<w>a): sorghum variety.

lifinti (l/f/n/ti): pairing. Refers to reciprocal arrangements for the use of oxen and labour.

mahaber (mah'/ber/): association. Usually refers to religious associations that meet monthly to celebrate a particular saint.

mahares (mah'/res/): ploughing.

mahares b'hayli (mah'/res/ b'h'ay/li): ploughing by force. Refers to cases where a tenant tries to overturn the decision of a landholder not to rent out a specific plot of land, by ploughing that land. An offense that may be taken to the justice committee of the *tabiya*.

maharesha (mah'/resha): metal plough tip.

mahgoma (mah'/goma): traditional healer who uses a plastic cup to bleed a wound.

mahkelay (mae/k'elay/): middle. Used to refer to land of a middle quality, or a household "in the middle" in terms of wealth.

may (may/): water.

may hamed (may/ h'amed): soil and water. Used to refer to soil and water conversation programmes.

meahmin (meeam/n/): name for a household with a woman alone, without a husband.

meahr (meear/): honey.

meahtsid (mae/TSid/): metal scythe with wooden handle used for cutting grain or grass.

mebaro (mebaro); breaking clumps of soil or root systems by hand with a pick, in areas where the plough cannot go.

mechelet (meCHelet/): holy water attributed with healing powers.

mehaza (meh'aza): cohort.

mehefas (m/h/fas/): measuring grain into sacks.

mehelaw (m/h'/law/): herding.

mehesay (m/h'/say/): threshing by hand.

mehraj (m/h'/raj/): literally, "salvage". Refers to the giving of a plot of land for one agricultural season to a creditor, in lieu of repayment of a loan.

mekwannent (mek/wanen/t/): noble. See also *mesfint*.

meker (meK'er/): area where plants grow that can be cut and used as incense.

mekeyeh (meK'e/y/h'/): red soil.

mekuraf (m/K'uraf/): grazing.

mele (m//ei): a means of obtaining seed, wherein a creditor provides a loan of seed in exchange for a share of the harvest.

meleley (m//e/ley/): wheat variety.

memehadar (memeh'ader/): administrator. Typically used as synonymous with *fetsamit*, connoting the executive group of the *tabiya*.

menani (menani): outside the world. Connotes those who leave aside worldly pleasures and live in the realm of religious contemplation and spirituality, such as monks.

menelik (m/n/lik/): unit of measure. Also refers to a conical cup used for drinking *sewa*.

mengisti (men/g/s/ti): government.

merah (mer/ea): wedding. Connotes in a particular, a traditional wedding ceremony, as opposed to smaller wedding ceremonies now common in the village (see also *misil* and *mulahk*). For a *merah*, the bride is brought from her sponsoring or parental household by the groom and the groom's male marriage friends, and there is a formal witnessing of the property donated to the marriage from both sides. Feasts are held in both the bride and the groom's households. A *merah* is common for first marriages only, and especially when the bride is a virgin. The word also connotes "marriage".

merah kefti (mer/ea k'ef/ti): "cattle marriage". Connotes a dowry marriage, prevalent during the imperial period for first marriages, in which the household of the bride would donate a larger amount of property to the marriage than the groom, in the form of cattle. The groom's household would provide some amount of grain, as well as some *risti* land granted to him by his father. Although dowry marriages are no longer legal, it is still common in first marriages for the household of the bride to denote her portion of property in the form of cattle, although donations from both sides must now be roughly commensurate in value. The bride now also brings some amount of land to the marriage. The provision of cattle by the bride's household is said to give confidence on the bride, and elicit respect from her new husband.

merahk (m/rak'/): calf.

meraht (mer/eaht/): bride. Also, for either male or female, a relational term for one's daughter-in-law. It is considered normative for the relation between a female and her *meraht* to be tense and conflict-ridden, whereas the relation between a male and his *meraht* will be close and familial.

merahwi (mer/eaui): groom

meret (mere't/): land.

mergem (mer/gem/): curse. The most severe punishment a father can bestow on a son, connoting an end to the relationship, and the son's exodus from the household.

mero (m/e/ro): unit of measure.

mes (me/s/): mead.

meseh (mes/ee): wooden pitchfork used for threshing.

meseles (mes/les/): unit of measure.

mesfint (mes/f/n/t/): can be glossed as "lord". Originally the titled nobility of Ethiopia. Recently, has also come to mean anyone who had wealth during the imperial period, and who is perceived to be against the present programme of political and economic reform for reasons of self-interest.

meshela (m/shela): sorghum variety.

meskel (mes/kel/): cross or crucifix. Also refers to the religious holiday of the Cross.

metehan (met/h'an/): grinding grain.

metehanit (med/h'anit/): medicine.

metselemta (meTSelem/ta): "making black". Connotes making a false accusation against someone.

mewah (mewae/): payment to the church for christening, death, or on the main religious days in the annual calendar, in the form of a set amount of grain. The amount is adjusted to relieve pressure on grain supply during food shortages.

mewfar (m/w/tar/): land rental.

mewgaya (mew/gae/ya): gift provided to a landholder by a tenant.

mezeker (mezek/r/): literally, "to remember". Refers to a household's monthly remembrance or honouring of a saint. Includes the preparation of *sewa* and sometimes food, invitations to neighbours and others to come and drink, and a blessing from a priest.

mezrae (m/z/rae/): planting.

mikre bet (m/k/ri be't/): literally, "counciling house", but is typically glossed as equivalent to "assembly". Refers to the general assembly of the *tabiya*, from which the smaller executive group (*fetsamit*) is chosen.

mimhar (m/m/har/): winnowing.

misar (misar/); a plough.

misil (m/s/l/): type of simple marriage ceremony, where there is only a small party and small number of guests (or none at all) at either the bride or the groom's houses. Like *merah*, however, the bride is still brought from her parental household to the groom's household by the groom and/or his male marriage friends, and the property brought to the marriage from both sides is agreed at the time of the marriage itself. Typically, a *misil* takes place for second marriages, but may be used for first marriages if the sponsoring households cannot afford a *merah*, including where the bride is a virgin.

mitsray (m/TS/ray/): training an ox to accept the yoke.

mkram (m/K'/ram/): collecting grain kernels from the ground after threshing.

mogogo (mogogo): round, black, clay-fired surface used for cooking, especially *enjera*.

msah (m/sah'): the mid-day meal.

mud (mud/): having all one's landholding in the same location. Also means the first and largest plot of land one receives in a distribution (see also *derebo* and *salsay*).

mulahk (mulaK'/): type of marriage where there is no formal ceremony; the bride comes herself from her sponsoring or parental household to the groom's household, and the property brought to the marriage from both sides is decided at a later date. Typically, *mulahk* occurs for a second or third marriages, especially when the woman is older and is no longer a virgin, and/or when the groom has an urgent need for a wife to be present in his household, especially in order to prepare food and carry out other domestic tasks done exclusively by women.

nahmetu (nae^umetu): connotes a national annual holiday. Often used to refer to the annual day of a particular saint.

nahri (nae^u/ri): small mound of drying grain with heads placed inward in a circular pattern, left on the land to dry until threshing.

nakeray (nak'/ray/): for either male or female, a relational term for one's son-in-law. It is considered normative for the relation between a male and his *nakeray* to be tense and conflict-ridden, whereas the relation between a female and her *nakeray* will be close and familial.

nehlti (n/e^u/lti): for a female, a relational term for one's husband's female consanguines, especially sisters. Also refers (for females only) to one's brother's wife. It is considered normative for relations with one's *nehlti* to be poor and conflict-ridden.

netsela (ne^uTSela): cotton shawl used mainly on special occasions, with decorative markings woven into the fabric; often worn wrapped around the waist by women.

nhela (neK'/la): first ploughing.

nhibi (n/hib/): bees.

nhkuts (n/K'^uTS/): dry, not growing, dying, or dead. Also synonymous with "unlucky".

nifki (n/f/Ki): unit of measure.

nuzaze (nuzaze'): will made by a dying person regarding property division and inheritance.

rebuk mewgaya (reb/K): "One fourth gift". Name for a land rental arrangements in which the renter pays the landholder an initial "gift" of one fourth of the harvest, after which the harvest is divided in half between them.

redahta (redae^u/ta): gift or aid assistance.

regwuyd (reg<w>uy/d/): rich. Commonly used to refer to land of a rich quality.

rehkik (reKiK'/): poor. Commonly used to refer to land of a poor quality.

retebuni (r/Tebuni): a party where food and *sewa* is served to guests, who in turn give cash gifts to the host, in order to help with a problem - for example, an expensive medical operation that must be performed.

righwe (r/g/he): plant from which grass strands can be cut and dried for basket weaving. Also, the grass strands themselves.

rihus (r/h'us/): wet, alive, green. Also synonymous with "luck".

riste kefti (r/s/te kef/ti): literally, "risti of the cattle". Refers to any land not used for agriculture, but more commonly means land where cattle or other livestock rest; for example, land around the watering hole, or close to the community grazing area.

risti (r/s/ti): refers to land held by right of descent, as well as the tenure system by which such rights operated. Also, *ristenna*, which refers to one who holds such rights in land.

sahri (sae/ri): uncut grass.

sahsa (sae/sae): barley variety, commonly used in the preparation of beer (*sewa*).

salsay (sal/say/): having one's landholding in three places. Also means a third plot of land received during a distribution.

sebel (TSebel/): denotes a traditional association, linked to religious practice (See also *senbet sebel* and *mahaber*).

sedet (s/det/): Connotes a migration to beg for food or work, as a result of severe poverty or famine conditions.

sefee (sef/ei): round flat basket typically used for cleaning grain or serving bread.

sekela (seK'ela): building in a compound, round in shape and typically with thatched roof, used for grain storage, guest quarters, or other purposes.

seleste gebeta (seles/te gebeta): unit of measure.

senbet sebel (sen/bet/ TSebel/): Sunday association, for honouring a particular saint.

senday (s/n/day/): wheat variety.

serit (s/rit/): customary rules. Also refers to the written rules of governance adopted by each *tabiya*.

sebay (s/b/eay/): husband

sebeyti (sebey/ti): wife

sebeyti abo: step-mother; literally, "the wife of my father".

sebeyti hawey (sebey/ti h'away/): for males only, a relational term for one's brother's wife. (For females, one's brother's wife is one's *nehlti*). It is considered normative for relations with one's *sebeyti hawey* to be close and mutually supportive.

sewa (s/wa): beer made mainly from barley.

shahan (shah'ane): a unit of measure, equal to a *menelik*.

shakala (shak'/la): clay conical cup, of the same size as a *menelik*.

shekali (sheKali): daily labourer or worker.

sherfa (sh/r/fa): large basket used for grain storage.

shewit (shewit/): greenness, or something not quite ripe. Connotes the first pulses picked by hand from the plant and served to guests as a symbol of the coming harvest, or eaten by the household to stretch food supply.

shiro (sh/ro): sauce made from ground horse beans, eaten with *enjera*; may also include peas or vetch. *Shiro* in many other parts of Tigray is comprised of chick peas (*shumburah*), but these are not commonly grown in Enda Mariyam village.

shumagele (sh/mag/le): elder or mediator.

siso (sisobad/m/): "one-third". Refers to a ploughing arrangement wherein oxen hire is paid for with two days of labour. *Siso* also refers to a rental arrangement in which payment of one-third of the harvest is made to the landholder.

tabiya (*Tabiya*): smallest unit of government administration, that can be glossed as a "sub-district", comprising a number of villages.

taf (*Taf*/): a hardy cereal grain indigenous to Ethiopia, known by its very small kernels and grass-like appearance when in the field.

tahtay (tah/tay/): below or underneath.

tahtay Enda Mariyam (tah/tay/ Endamar/yam/): refers to Enda Michael village, "below" Enda Mariyam village (at a lower altitude).

tanika (tanika): tin cup used as a measure, equal to one *menelik*.

tayta (tay/ta): staple bread (see also *enjera*).

tazazi (t'eazazi): one who acknowledges or receives orders, as a son from his father.

tebib (*Tebib*/): refers usually to blacksmiths, and connotes those who have the power of the evil eye.

tegadalay (tegadalay/): fighter.

tehadeso (tehad/so): celebration or party.

telam (telam/): unit of measure.

teli (teli): goat.

terera (*Terera*): making boundaries, as on the land.

termuz (*Ter*/muz/) bottle.

terwa (ter/wah'/): second ploughing.

teselas (tes/las/): third ploughing

teskar (tes/kar/): remembrance celebration for one who has died, normatively performed one year after the death, but often delayed by consanguines until a large celebration can be afforded (see also *arbah*).

thktikoh (T/K'/T/K'o): special snack food prepared on the first day of the month (*bahti*) in the Ethiopian calendar, consisting of boiled wheat kernels and/or pulses.

tihtenya (t/h'/tenya): politeness.

tilmi (t/l/mi): a row on a plot of land made by a single pass of the plough.

timeet (T/me't/): famine, time of food shortage, time of severe poverty.

timri (T/m/ri): approximate unit of measure for straw or grass, connoting a bundle that fills a cotton shawl. (See also *tsor*).

tsada taf (TSae/da Taff): white *taf*, referred to as the "first grain" in Enda Mariyam. The more valuable of the two *taf* varieties grown in terms of market prices, and the most valued grain overall in terms of taste.

tsbuk getse (TS/buK' geTS/): literally, "good face". Connotes one who gives the impression of a contented or trustworthy character.

tsebhi (TSeb/h'i): sauce served with *tayta*, typically made from ground pulses mixed with spices and oil.

tsehiyai (TS/h/yay/): weeding. Also refers more specifically to the second, or main weeding.

tselay (TSelaei): a person's enemy, often in consequence of a dispute over property.

tsenaht (TS/n/eat/): survey.

tserfi (TSer/fi): slander.

tserit (TS/re't/): cleansing or cleaning. Used most commonly to refer to meetings of all *tabiya* residents sponsored by the political cadre of the *wereda* once a year or once every two years to review political and economic developments.

tsigehi (TS/g/ei): method of fallowing land where the land is ploughed but not planted, for purposes of soil regeneration.

tsimdi (TS/m/di): a unit of land, understood as roughly the area that can be ploughed by a team of oxen in a single day, the actual size of which varies from village to village. Also used to refer to a team of oxen, and the use of a team of oxen for one day.

tsome (TSom/): a fast, associated with religious observance.

tsor (TSor): approximate unit of measure for straw or grass, connoting a bundle that fills a cotton shawl, or *kuta*. (See also *timn*).

twaf (T/waf/): a candle prepared from honey used in church.

wahas (wah'as/): guarantor or witness.

walka (wal/ka): clay soil.

warsa (war/sa): for a female, a relational term for one's husband's male consanguines, especially brothers. It is considered normative for relations with one's *warsa* to be poor and conflict-ridden.

wata (wata): overly talkative or argumentative woman. Also connotes a music player.

wedub (wud/b/): partisan or party. Used in Enda Mariyam village most commonly to connote the TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front).

wedi (wedi): son

wefera (wefera): work party hosted by an individual household, usually for agricultural labour such as weeding. Also connotes community work; for example, clearing thorn bushes from the community grazing area.

wehej (w/h'/j/): flood.

wehlet (w/e/let/): purchase of labour, typically for agricultural tasks, in exchange for cash or grain.

wereda (*wereda*): unit of government administration that can be glossed as a "district", comprising a number of *tabiyas*.

woyna dega (woyna de'ga): middle altitudes, between 1600 and 2500 meters.

"*yeseltenay*" (*yesel/Tenay*): "we are not civilized". Used sometimes as comment upon the village as a whole when someone has behaved badly or greedily.

yewah (*yewah*): foolish in present-day usage; in the past, referred to one who was naive.

yihadig (*eihad/g*): Tigrinya expression of the acronym EPRDF (Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front).

zama (*zama*): for a male, a relational term for one's wife's consanguines, especially siblings. Also, for either males or females, the term for one's sister's husband. It is considered normative for relations with one's *zama* to be close and mutually supportive.

zemed (*zemed*): refers to consanguines of more distant relation, with whom a person does not necessarily have a close social relationship.

zeraf (*zeraf*): taking a wife by force or without permission from her sponsoring or parental household.

zere (zer/ei): sowing. Also refers to the ploughing done just after sowing.

zoba (zoba): an administrative unit of territory, comprising a number of *weredas*. Does not have an elected government, but includes zonal level offices of various ministries.

APPENDIX 4 - LOCAL MEASURES AND CONVERSIONS

1. Grain or Pulses

Units of measure for grain and pulses vary between *weredas*. In Dega Tembien, the most common unit of measure is the *menelik*, a conical cup used for drinking beer. According to the *wereda* Ministry of Agriculture, and my own calculations based on sample weighing, a *menelik* averages 0.60 kilograms. Larger measures are then defined according to how many *menelik* they contain, as follows:

| | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| <i>menelik</i> | = 1 <i>menelik</i> | = 0.6 kilograms |
| <i>enkaah</i> | = 2 | 1.2 |
| <i>mero</i> | = 4 | 2.4 |
| <i>kahbo</i> | = 8 | 4.8 |
| <i>kahbo mero</i> | = 12 | 7.2 |
| <i>nifki</i> | = 16 | 9.6 |
| <i>meseles</i> | = 24 | 14.4 |
| <i>gebeta</i> | = 32 | 19.2 |
| <i>kefer (gebeta nifki)</i> | = 48 | 28.8 |
| <i>klite gebeta</i> | = 64 | 38.4 |
| <i>klite gebeta nifki</i> | = 80 | 48.0 |
| <i>abet (seleste gebeta)</i> | = 96 | 57.6 |
| <i>telam</i> | = 384 | 230.4 |

Measures that are smaller than a *menelik* include:

finjal = approximately 50 grams

kwuankulu = approximately 2.5 *finjal*, or 125 grams

2. Land Holdings

Landholdings are designated in two ways. The first is by *gibri*, meaning roughly "share". Under the present land tenure system, every adult is entitled to a 1/2 *gibri* share of land. The size of a *gibri* varies from village to village, depending on the total arable land available, divided by the number of households, and adjusted for children and land quality.

In Enda Mariyam, informants did not typically refer to their land in terms of *gibri*, but rather in terms of *tsimdi*, or the area of land that can be ploughed by a team of oxen in

a day. This unit of measure also varies. In Dega Tembien *wereda*, the district office of the Ministry of Agriculture estimated that 4 *tsimdi* equals one hectare (or 1 *tsimdi* equals 0.25 hectares).

During fieldwork, measurements were taken of each of the plots in the landholdings of six case-study households. From these measurements, an average landholding of 7,780 square metres or **0.78 hectares per household** was obtained, ranging from 0.56 to 1.08 hectares per household.

It should be remembered that a household's landholding is not necessarily commensurate with the area of land actually farmed, due to land rental practices. For example, one case-study household virtually doubled the area they farmed by renting in additional plots, while another case-study household farmed only approximately one-third of their holding, due to renting plots out.

Also, the area of land farmed may differ from the area of land held due to some households cultivating additional plots belonging to close relatives who reside outside the village, or who have died. Finally, the physical size of a household's plots may not be the same as its actual landholding, due to the practice of multiple-holding known as *ferehot*, wherein one plot may be held by two or more farmers simultaneously. For example, the total physical size of all plots included in one case study household's holding was 15,764 square meters, whereas the actual amount held by that household was only 8,093, due to *ferehot*.

APPENDIX 5 - THE ETHIOPIAN CALENDAR

The Ethiopian year consists of 365 days divided into twelve months of thirty days each, and a thirteenth month with only five days. It runs approximately seven years behind the Gregorian calendar. The first day of the Ethiopian year 1986, for example, fell on September 11, 1993 in the Gregorian calendar. Unless specifically indicated, all dates in the text of the thesis are from the Gregorian calendar. Tigrinya words for the months in the Ethiopian year are provided below, including their corresponding dates in the Gregorian calendar for 1993/94:

| <u>Ethiopian Calendar (1993/94)</u> | <u>Gregorian Calendar</u> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Meskerem</i> | September 11 - October 10, 1993 |
| <i>Tikimti</i> | October 11 - November 9, 1993 |
| <i>Hedar</i> | November 10 - December 9, 1993 |
| <i>Tahesas</i> | December 10, 1993 - January 8, 1994 |
| <i>Tri</i> | January 9 - February 7, 1994 |
| <i>Yekatit</i> | February 8 - March 9, 1994 |
| <i>Megabit</i> | March 10 - April 8, 1994 |
| <i>Miyaziya</i> | April 9 - May 8, 1994 |
| <i>Genbot</i> | May 9 - June 7, 1994 |
| <i>Sene</i> | June 8 - July 7, 1994 |
| <i>Hamle</i> | July 8 - August 6, 1994 |
| <i>Nehase</i> | August 7 - September 5, 1994 |
| <i>Pagumen</i> | September 6 - September 10, 1994 |

2. Days of the Week

| | |
|---------------|-----------|
| <i>Senbet</i> | Sunday |
| <i>Senuy</i> | Monday |
| <i>Selus</i> | Tuesday |
| <i>Rebueh</i> | Wednesday |
| <i>Hamus</i> | Thursday |
| <i>Arbi</i> | Friday |
| <i>Kedam</i> | Saturday |

APPENDIX 6 - RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS IN ENDA MARIYAM

The following is a schedule of religious holidays observed in Enda Mariyam. Annual holidays include both national holy days observed by Ethiopian Orthodox Christians across the country, and more locally-recognised holidays. Monthly holidays vary from parish to parish: the monthly holidays listed here are for Enda Mariyam *kushet* only.

1. Annual Religious Holidays and Fasts

| <u>Holiday</u> | <u>Date in Ethiopian Calendar (1993/94)</u> |
|--|---|
| <i>Kudus Yohanis</i> (Saint's Day; New Year's Day) | <i>Meskerem 1</i> |
| <i>Meskel</i> (Finding of the True Cross) | <i>Meskerem 17</i> |
| <i>Abune Aregawi</i> (Saint's Day) | <i>Tikimti 14</i> |
| <i>Kudus Mikael</i> (Saint's Day; Start of 3 Day Holiday) | <i>Hedar 12-14</i> |
| <i>Kudisti Mariyam</i> (Saint's Day) | <i>Hedar 21</i> |
| <i>Tekle Haymanot</i> (Saint's Day) | <i>Tahesas 24</i> |
| <i>Beahl Ezgiher</i> (Christmas) | <i>Tahesas 29</i> |
| <i>Timket</i> (Epiphany) | <i>Tri 11</i> |
| <i>Arbah Tsome</i> (55 Day Fast Before Easter) | <i>Yekatit 28-Miyaziya 23</i> |
| <i>Medhani Alem</i> (Day of Christ) | <i>Megabit 26</i> |
| <i>Himamat</i> (Week of holidays, from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday) | <i>Miyaziya 16-23</i> |
| <i>Fashiga</i> (Easter, Start of a Week Holiday) | <i>Miyaziya 23-30</i> |
| <i>Maryiam Genbot</i> (Day of Virgin Mary) | <i>Genbot 1</i> |
| <i>Tahmer Mariyam</i> (Week holiday for the Virgin Mary) | <i>Genbot 22-29</i> |
| <i>Tsome Hawerya</i> (Fast of the Apostles, 34 Days) | <i>Sene 1- Hamle 4</i> |
| <i>Beahl Hamsa</i> (“5 day holiday”) | <i>Sene 16-21</i> |
| <i>Hawerya</i> (Day of the Apostles) | <i>Hamle 5</i> |
| <i>Tsome Fulseta</i> (Two week Fast before Assumption) | <i>Nehase 1-15</i> |
| <i>Fulseta</i> (Assumption) | <i>Nehase 16</i> |

2. Monthly Religious Holidays

| <u>Holiday/Saint</u> | <u>Day in the Ethiopian Month</u> |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Aba Gabar</i> | 5th |
| <i>Selase</i> | 7th |
| <i>Mikael</i> | 12th |
| <i>Aregawi</i> | 14th |
| <i>Kidane Mehret</i> | 16th |
| <i>Gebriel</i> | 19th |
| <i>Mariyam</i> | 21st |
| <i>Giorgis</i> | 23rd |
| <i>Tekle Haymanot</i> | 24th |
| <i>Medhani Alem</i> | 27th |
| <i>Beahl Ezgiher</i> | 29th |

APPENDIX 7 - TRANSLATION OF *TABIYA SERIT*, ENDA MARIYAM

The following is a translation of the main rules of the *serit* of Enda Mariyam *tabiya*, obtained from a member of the *tabiya ferdi bayto*. The *serit* was adopted by a majority vote of *tabiya* residents in the early 1980s, and was the local law during the war years. Overseeing implementation of the *serit* was the responsibility of the *ferdi bayto* (justice committee).

Since early 1995, new civil and penal codes have been adopted throughout Tigray which further clarify the responsibilities and jurisdiction of courts at different levels, including the *tabiya*. Most of the rules presented here remain in effect, however. For convenience, rules are presented under discreet subject headings.

1. Marriage and Divorce

An engagement is agreed by the two people in the couple only, the bride and groom. An engagement will be finalised with the *bayto*. If the couple want to break the engagement, this will also be finalised with the *bayto*.

The groom will be a minimum of 22 years old on marriage, and the bride a minimum of 15 years old on marriage.

At the time of marriage, the bride and groom will bring equal property or money. This property or money will be for the marriage. The marriage property will be agreed in discussion between the father of the bride and the father of the groom.

The marriage property will be registered with the *bayto*. If there is extra property brought that belongs privately to the groom or to the bride, this will also be registered with the *bayto*. After the marriage, all marriage property will be equally owned by husband and wife.

The number of people who go to the bride's house during the wedding will be agreed by the father of the bride and the father of the groom. If more people attend than agreed, these people cannot ask the father of the bride for food.

A husband cannot beat his wife. If the bride is not a virgin, the groom can leave her, but he cannot beat her. If it is in his interest, he can stay with her.

If the husband and wife change *tabiyas*, the rules governing their marriage will also change to the rules of that *tabiya*.

If a son gives service to his parents before his marriage, and if his parents do not give him anything for his marriage, he can take them to court. If a parent gives things to his son for his son's marriage, the parent cannot take them back again.

When a son lives with his wife at the house of his parents, if the property he received from his parents upon marriage has not been recorded by the *bayto*, the son cannot claim these things when he and his wife separate to live apart.

If there is divorce, each spouse will take their private property as registered with the *bayto* upon their marriage. All other marriage property will be divided equally.

If there are children, a husband must pay to support them. For each child, he must pay 30 *birr* and 1 *abet* of grain each year. Support for children will be paid for 3 years. After that, the *bayto* will give the children land.

If a husband and wife divorce and they have only 1 house, it will be decided by lottery who gets to keep the house.

2. Death and Inheritance

If a person dies, he is buried in church at a holiday time, so that relatives can attend. If a person wishes to be buried in a certain church, these wishes must be respected. Otherwise, he will be buried in the church he regularly attended.

Funeral ceremonies will be made according to the wealth of the family, and can be held with even a small amount of food. Priests cannot criticise the family for making only a small ceremony.

Before a person dies, he must say his will in front of 3 witnesses. He must tell how he wants his property divided on his death. If a person is weak, and says his will just before he dies without witnesses, it is not legal. A will should be registered with the *bayto*. If it is not registered, it is not legal.

If there is no legal will, property will go first to the children. If there are no children, property will go to the parents. If they are not living, property will go to other relatives. If there are no relatives, property will revert to the *bayto*.

If a parent dies by accident, his children inherit and divide the property among themselves. When a father dies, property division is equal between all his children, including from former wives or mistresses.

If someone dies and leaves orphaned children, close relatives will be called and the *bayto* will discuss with them how much property will be kept for the children. All property of the children will be registered by the *bayto*.

If someone dies with no children or relatives, and he had a person who gave him labour without salary, that person will inherit the property. If there is no labourer, the *bayto* will inherit the property. If there is a person living with a family as a resident labourer, and the labourer dies and doesn't have any other family, the family can take his property.

If a man dies, and he leaves debts, the one who inherits his property must also pay his debts.

If a woman's husband dies and she wants to remarry, she has to divide the property of her former husband equally among her children by him.

All divisions of property in cases of death will be posted publicly. If there is no disagreement, the property will be divided as posted.

3. Land

Men are eligible to own land at the age of 22 years. Women are eligible to own land at the age of 15 years. Once a man or woman reaches these ages, they should register with the *bayto* for land. If a person is of adult age and has lived for 6 months in the *tabiya*, they must get land.

Land is measured and divided according to rope measurements. If there is not enough land for all people in the *tabiya*, some extra land may be taken from another *tabiya*. The first land distributed to a person shall be near his house.

A husband and wife together get 1 *gibri* of land. A husband and wife with 1 child get 1 *gibri*. A husband and wife with 2 to 4 children get an extra $\frac{1}{4}$ *gibri*. A husband and wife with 4 to 7 children get an extra $\frac{1}{2}$ *gibri*.

Before land is divided, land quality shall be assessed. After a survey is made of land quality and distribution, this must be agreed by the people.

People who did not get land near their houses will receive land by lottery. People who don't have land will get land from the extra land of the *tabiya*.

If someone doesn't use his land for 1 year, the *bayto* can take from him $\frac{1}{2}$ *gibri* of land for redistribution. If somebody dies and has no surviving relatives, the *bayto* can take this land for redistribution.

If a person rents land from another, he must register with the *bayto*. If rented land is not registered, the renter is not allowed to take the $\frac{1}{2}$ harvest for himself; the owner of the land will keep everything.

If someone is disabled, even if they are younger than the adult age, they can receive land. Those who are insane are not eligible to receive land. They will get food and support from the people.

Before land is separated or redistributed, it must be studied where grazing areas will be, and where community forest areas will be.

Land belonging to individuals must be clearly marked and divided from neighbouring land.

If someone wants to build a house, he must apply to a committee who studies where to build the house, and grants permission. No one may build a house without this permission.

If a man's wife dies, and there are no surviving children, her land will be redistributed, but the husband will be able to keep the land close to his house.

4. Regarding the Powers of the *Bayto*

If the *ferdi bayto* members don't see it in the *serit*, they cannot make a decision on an issue. All members of the *ferdi bayto* must know the rules.

If a person has a court appointment and doesn't come on the day they are called, they will pay a fine. If the court says a person must pay a fine, and they don't pay, they will be fined extra. If someone doesn't agree with a decision of the *tabiya* court, he can appeal to the *wereda* court, but this must be within 10 days.

Higher courts can reverse decisions of lower courts. Lower courts have the right to appeal decisions of higher courts, if they feel justice has not been done properly.

Bribing the *bayto* or attempting to influence it in any way is prohibited. If a *bayto* member is bribed or influenced, he will be taken to the *wereda*.

Witnesses to disputes must come if they are called by the *bayto*. If they don't come, they will pay a fine according to their wealth.

If someone claims their house was robbed, the *bayto* has to see what was taken and make a report. No one else but *bayto* members can do this.

If there is a disagreement between husband and wife residing in this *tabiya*, neither one can start an application with the *bayto* of another *tabiya*.

If a man makes an accusation, but does not appear for his *bayto* appointment, the court can fine him.

If a man borrows money from another, he must pay it back. If he does not repay, but is spending money in other ways, the *bayto* can control his money to be sure the debt is repaid.

5. Property Issues

Beehives are the property of the first person to see them. People who come later cannot claim them, although agreements can be made between people to share beehives.

If bees arrive in one house, they belong to the owner of that house. If they arrive in two houses, a *shumagele* will be called to say which house they belong to.

If you hurt another man's animals, you have to pay a fine. If your animals eat the grain of another man, you must pay him the equivalent amount of grain.

If you cut trees without permission, you must pay a fine to the *bayto*. If you want to cut a tree, you must first get permission.

It is not allowed to kill wild animals such as lions. However, anti-people or anti-crop animals such as hyenas or rats may be killed.

6. Various Offenses

If anyone criticises another *tabiya*, or spreads rumors, they will have to pay a fine according to their wealth. If anyone insults another person by calling them a donkey or slave or other serious insult, including to his religion, they will have to pay a fine.

If a person steals, they must pay back the property taken, and they will be taken to prison.

If a man or woman marry before the legal adult age, they must each pay 100 *birr*, and the marriage will be dissolved. If a man or wife are unfaithful, they must pay the partner 100 to 200 *birr*.

If a woman falsely accuses a man of fathering her child, she must pay a 50 to 100 *birr* fine to the *bayto*, and the property she claimed from the man for this child must be returned to him.

If a person cuts trees from the community forest without permission, they must pay from 5 to 30 *birr*, and return the tree to the *bayto*.

If a man is assigned to guard duty but doesn't go, he must pay 5 *birr*. If anyone is found with a weapon without permission, they must pay the *bayto* 5 *birr*.

If there is a fight, and one man is hurt, each person fighting must pay a fine for fighting, and the one who did the hurting must pay the other for medicine. If they want, the two who fought can resolve this among themselves with a *shumagele*.

If one man burns a house, or hay, or grass, he must reimburse this property and pay the owner of the property 300 *birr*.

If a person kills the cattle, donkey or ox of another person, they have to pay the price of the animal to the owner and also pay 30 *birr* fine to the *bayto*. If a person kills the sheep or goat of another, they have to pay the price of the animal to the owner and 5

birr to the *bayto*. If someone kills a sheep or goat, he can also settle directly with the owner without going to the *bayto*.

If a person gives false evidence about someone, they will pay 40 to 100 *birr*.

If some rapes a woman, they will pay her 200 *birr* and also 200 *birr* to the *bayto*. If the woman was a virgin, they will pay 250 *birr* to her and 200 to the *bayto*.

If a person kills another, they will pay his family 1,500 *birr* and go to the *wereda* court for judgement. If the killing was accidental, they will pay 200 *birr* to his family, and go to the *wereda* court. If a person disables another, they will pay 500 *birr* to his family and go to the *wereda* court.

APPENDIX 8 - FREQUENCY ANALYSIS OF HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

The following is a simple frequency analysis of main findings of a household survey conducted among 128 households in Enda Mariyam and 51 households in Tegula. (See Appendix 1, Section 4.4). Findings for the two villages are presented side-by-side. Results point to differences in agricultural productivity and grain wealth between Enda Mariyam and Tegula, and between male-headed and female-headed households. Similar results for both villages point to indicators likely to be regular features of villages throughout Tigray. All results refer to the 1993/94 agricultural season, unless otherwise indicated.

| | | |
|--|--------------|--------|
| 1. Type of household: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| Male-headed | 75.8 % | 70.6 % |
| Female-headed | 24.2 % | 29.4 % |
| 2. Average number of persons: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| All households | 4.27 | 4.82 |
| Male-headed only | 4.49 | 5.44 |
| Female-headed only | 3.55 | 3.33 |
| 2-ox households only | 5.00 | 5.00 |
| 1-ox households only | 4.47 | 5.33 |
| 0-ox households only | 3.53 | 4.00 |
| 3. Primary occupation of household head: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| Farming | 83.5 % | 82.4 % |
| Writing bibles | 3.1 % | 0 % |
| Basket weaving | 0.8 % | 0 % |
| Hair braiding | 0.8 % | 0 % |
| Selling beer | 0.8 % | 2.0 % |
| Spinning cotton | 1.6 % | 2.0 % |
| Non-farmer with no other occupation ¹¹² | 9.4 % | 13.6 % |

¹¹² Of these, 100% are female heads of households.

| | | |
|---|--------------|--------|
| 4. Status of household head: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| Married | 75.0 % | 70.6 % |
| Widowed | 12.5 % | 17.6 % |
| Divorced | 10.9 % | 9.8 % |
| Spouse absent | 1.6 % | 2.0 % |
| 5. Household landholdings: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| Average number of <i>gibri</i> ¹¹³ | 1.14 | 1.29 |
| Average number of plots ¹¹⁴ | 3.02 | 2.74 |
| Households with "landless adult" member ¹¹⁵ | 15.6 % | 15.7 % |
| 6. Composition of total livestock population: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| Oxen | 26.0 % | 37.6 % |
| Other cattle | 17.8 % | 30.7 % |
| Shoats | 44.8 % | 16.2 % |
| Equines | 11.1 % | 15.3 % |
| 7. Households owning no livestock (minus poultry): | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| All households | 24.2 % | 27.5 % |
| Female-headed only | 58.0 % | 60.0 % |

¹¹³ The size of a *gibri* varies from *tabiya* to *tabiya*. Hence, this finding is not particularly useful. It would have been better to ask the number of *tsimdi*, which can more readily be translated into an area measurement. See Appendix 4.

¹¹⁴ These responses are almost certainly under-estimates.

¹¹⁵ "Landless adult" refers to a person who has reached the legal age of adulthood (15 years for women, 22 years for men), but has not yet received an adult 1/2 *gibri* share of land.

| | | | |
|--|--|----------------------------------|--|
| 8. Animal composition, livestock-owning households: | | | |
| | Enda Mariyam (97 households) | Tegula (37 households) | |
| Cattle, shoats, equine | 15.5 % | 10.8 % | |
| Cattle only | 47.4 % | 54.0 % | |
| Cattle & shoats | 22.7 % | 0 % | |
| Cattle & equine | 8.3 % | 29.7 % | |
| Shoats only | 4.0 % | 5.4 % | |
| Shoat, equine | 1.0 % | 0 % | |
| Equine only | 1.0 % | 0 % | |
| 9. Distribution of oxen: | | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula | |
| All households: | | | |
| Own 0 ox | 32.0 % | 39.2 % | |
| Own 1 ox | 44.5 % | 41.2 % | |
| Own 2 oxen | 21.9 % | 15.7 % | |
| Own 3 or 4 oxen | 1.6 % | 4.0 % | |
| Female-headed only: | | | |
| Own 0 ox | 74.2 % | 80.0 % | |
| Own 1 ox | 16.1 % | 20.0 % | |
| Own 2 oxen | 9.7 % | 0 % | |
| Male-headed only: | | | |
| Own 0 ox | 18.6 % | 22.2 % | |
| Own 1 ox | 53.6 % | 50.0 % | |
| Own 2 oxen | 25.8 % | 22.2 % | |
| Own 3 or 4 oxen | 2.1 % | 5.6 % | |
| 10. Means of ploughing: | | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula | |
| Paired 1 ox with ox of another household | 39.1 % | 37.3 % | |
| Own 2 oxen, ploughed independently | 26.5 % | 21.6 % | |
| Hired oxen and/or labour | 14.9 % | 17.7 % | |
| Land rented out, did not plough | 12.5 % | 19.6 % | |
| Received free loan oxen/labour | 7.1 % | 3.9 % | |

| | | |
|---|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 11. Means of ploughing, female-headed households: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| Land rented out, did not plough | 48.4 % | 60.0 % |
| Paired 1 ox with ox of another household | 19.4 % | 13.3 % |
| Received free loan oxen and/or labour | 19.3 % | 13.3 % |
| Own 2 oxen, ploughed independently | 3.2 % | 0 % |
| Hired oxen and/or labour | 9.7 % | 13.3 % |
| 12. Means of payment, households hiring oxen/labour: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam (19 households) | Tegula (9 households) |
| Fodder only | 36.8 % | 12.5 % |
| Reciprocal labour loan | 21.1 % | 75.0 % |
| Fodder and labour loan | 15.8 % | 12.5 % |
| Cash | 15.8 % | 0 % |
| Reciprocal oxen loan | 10.5 % | 0 % |
| 13. Means of making up seed deficit: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| All households: | | |
| All from own storage | 46.1 % | 19.6 % |
| Borrowed | 43.0 % | 39.2 % |
| Bought | 9.4 % | 33.4 % |
| Borrowed and bought | 1.6 % | 7.8 % |
| 0-ox households only: | | |
| All from own storage | 22.0 % | 25.0 % |
| Borrowed | 69.0 % | 55.0 % |
| Bought | 9.0 % | 20.0 % |
| 2-ox households only: | | |
| All from own storage | 69.9 % | 12.5 % |
| Borrowed | 21.5 % | 0 % |
| Bought | 10.7 % | 87.5 % |

14. Households renting out land:

| | Enda Mariyam (25 households) | Tegula (13 households) |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| All households | 23.4 % | 37.3 % |
| Female-headed only | 76.7 % | 52.6 % |
| Male-headed only | 23.3 % | 47.4 % |
| 0-ox households only | 76.7 % | 68.4 % |
| 1-ox households only | 16.7 % | 26.3 % |
| 2-ox households only | 6.7 % | 5.3 % |

15. Households renting in land:

| | Enda Mariyam (30 households) | Tegula (19 households) |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| All households | 19.5 % | 25.5 % |
| Female-headed only | 4.0 % | 0 % |
| Male-headed only | 96.0 % | 100.0 % |
| 0-ox households only | 0 % | 0 % |
| 1-ox households only | 52.0 % | 53.8 % |
| 2-ox households only | 44.0 % | 38.5 % |
| 3 or 4-ox households | 4.0 % | 7.7 % |

16. Households leaving some land fallow:

| | Enda Mariyam (13 households) | Tegula (12 households) |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Total | 10.2 % | 23.5 % |
| Reasons: | | |
| Not enough seed | 38.5 % | 66.6 % |
| Not enough oxen | 30.8 % | 0 % |
| Not enough labour | 15.4 % | 0 % |
| Not enough seed/oxen | 7.7 % | 8.3 % |
| Land too poor to plant | 7.7 % | 25.0 % |

| | | |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| 17. Households that sold labour, 1992/93: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam (45 households) | Tegula (22 households) |
| Total | 35.4 % | 43.1 % |
| Main Place Where Sold: | | |
| Towns | 71.1 % | 68.2 % |
| Villages | 6.6 % | 31.8 % |
| Food-for-Work Projects | 22.3 % | 0 % |
| 18. Households that borrowed cash, 1992/93: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam (37 households) | Tegula (12 households) |
| All households | 29.1 % | 23.5 % |
| 0-ox households only | 30.0 % | 25.0 % |
| 2-ox households only | 25.0 % | 0 % |
| Sources (all households): | | |
| Relative | 50.0 % | 9.1 % |
| Non-relative | 13.9 % | 18.2 % |
| Monk | 19.4 % | 0 % |
| Government | 13.9 % | 63.6 % |
| Renter of household land | 2.8 % | 9.1 % |
| 19. Households that borrowed grain, 1992/93: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam (42 households) | Tegula (16 households) |
| All households | 32.8 % | 31.4 % |
| 0-ox households only | 43.9 % | 45.0 % |
| 2-ox households only | 7.1 % | 0 % |
| Creditor (all households): | | |
| Relative | 51.3 % | 37.5 % |
| Non-relative | 5.4 % | 37.5 % |
| Monk | 37.8 % | 0 % |
| Government | 0 % | 12.5 % |
| Renter of household land | 5.4 % | 12.5 % |

| | | |
|---|--------------|-----------------------|
| 20. Households that received food aid, 1992/93: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| Total | 1.6 % | 98.0 % |
| 21. When household grain finished, minus food aid: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| January | | 33.3 % ¹¹⁶ |
| February | | 7.8 % |
| March | | 21.6 % |
| April | 0.8 % | 25.5 % |
| May | 0.8 % | 1.9 % |
| June | 7.0 % | 5.9 % |
| July | 21.9 % | 1.9 % |
| August | 32.0 % | 1.9 % |
| September | 34.3 % | |
| October | 1.6 % | |
| Still have grain left | 1.6 % | |
| 22. Main means of making up deficit, minus food aid: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| Borrow grain/cash | 72.3 % | 34.2 % |
| Sell labour | 21.7 % | 42.1 % |
| Sell livestock | 6.0 % | 13.2 % |
| Eat less | 0 % | 2.6 % |
| Petty trade/services | 0 % | 7.8 % |
| 23. Marriages of household head: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| Average number of spouses | 1.78 | 1.53 |
| 24. Main reason previous marriage(s) ended: | | |
| | Enda Mariyam | Tegula |
| Divorce | 70.2 % | 64.1 % |
| Spouse died | 29.8 % | 35.8 % |

¹¹⁶ This percentage is almost certainly an exaggeration.